

Can we ignore what the New Testament says about signs of Jesus' return?

By Tony Higton

Introduction

Our embarrassment with the subject

Even writing the title of this paper makes me feel slightly vulnerable to charges of being a nutcase! I can see it now: Tony Higton walking along the main street holding a placard stating: "Prepare to meet thy doom!" or putting on the back of the car the bumper sticker: "If you hear the last trump, watch out, this driver is saved" (i.e. if the end times trumpet sounds the driver will be 'raptured' up to heaven without warning!).

The fact that I feel this way illustrates an important spiritual lesson. Eschatology, the doctrine of the End Times, is a very important aspect of biblical teaching. One ninth of the New Testament is about eschatology, yet many British and European Christians are embarrassed into silence about it because of the extremists who have a field day in the subject. This is surely a spiritual deceit.

We might feel free to teach about the Four Last Things: Death, Judgment, Heaven and (perhaps) Hell. We might also speak of Jesus' return in general. But when it comes to other matters such as interpreting the NT about the Great Tribulation, the Antichrist, the Battle of Armageddon and the Millennium, etc., we hide behind our uncertainties.

Even worse, we are threatened by discerning the Signs of the Times – the signs pointing towards the End – and we avoid the subject, in particular because of all those who have sought to match current events to prophecy but proved to be mistaken.

[I am aware of the influential and controversial views of N T Wright who claims that the passages in the Gospels that have long been understood as referring to a still future return of Jesus in glory actually refer to the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem and the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70. In the *Appendix* I outline my reasons for believing that the passages I have referred to in the main paper, whatever the allusion to the Fall of Jerusalem in AD70, refer to the Second Coming of Jesus which is a spectacular and glorious event in the future].

Our obligation to teach about the Signs of the Times

Jesus made it very clear that we are to recognise and teach about about the signs described in Matthew 24; Mark 13 and Luke 21. The NT teaches that we are to be watchful and discerning about them. Jesus said:

"Keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into. So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him" (Matt 24:42-44).

"Therefore keep watch because you do not know when the owner of the house will come back – whether in the evening, or at midnight, or when the cock crows, or at dawn. If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping. What I say to you, I say to everyone: 'Watch!'" (Mark 13:35-37).

"Be always on the watch" (Luke 21:36).

Paul expected believers to be waiting for Jesus coming from heaven (1 Thess 1:10). He says to the Thessalonians "what is our hope, our joy, or the crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus when he comes? Is it not you?" (1 Thess 2:19). He prays that they will be "blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones." (1 Thess 3:13). Then he says to them

"But you, brothers and sisters, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief. You are all children of the light and children of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness. So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be awake and sober" (1 Thess 5:4-6).

Jesus clearly taught that famines, earthquakes, pestilences and persecution are reminders of the coming End Times. He also expects apostasy and false prophets etc., to be reminders too. (Of course, he also taught and exemplified

compassion for those who suffer). How many of us actually take them as such?

The main thrust of this paper will be on discerning the Signs of the Times. We need to read what is going on in society and the world around us to see how it relates to what the Bible teaches about eschatology. This involves:

- seeking to be adequately informed.
- taking a properly critical attitude to this information and its possible implications.
- standing back and trying to get a sense of perspective about trends and dangers.

Attitudes to avoid

There are three attitudes towards discerning the Signs of the Times which we should seek to avoid:

- *Paranoia*: Suspecting everything, seeing apocalyptic doom everywhere, reading everything negatively, not supporting the good in society or the world because of the danger that some trends may lead to future evil.
- *Naivety*: Uncritically accepting the good motives and intentions behind what is going on in society and the world, only expecting the best, not taking seriously human selfishness.
- *Literalism*: Jumping to literalistic interpretations of Scripture and literalistic application of those interpretations to events and trends in society and the world.

Summary

This paper is an attempt to take the words of Jesus seriously in the 21st century. Writing in areas where much ridiculous and often paranoid material is produced is somewhat embarrassing but I would readily defend what I have said in this paper, which is backed up by carefully researched evidence. There is detailed evidence for all the points enumerated in this Summary. I have tried only to quote reliable and, where possible, original sources. I have mainly quoted secular sources and sought to avoid Christian and other sources which seem to be lacking in objectivity or the backing of reliable evidence.

In summary I believe that:

1. **The preliminary and repeated signs of the end** are, as expected, very evident. The New Testament doesn't actually say that they will increase in intensity as we draw near to the end but I note that:
 - It is debatable whether war is increasing currently, nevertheless there are serious factors which could lead to even greater wars than the world has already experienced in the future and there are more horrific weapons than ever before.
 - Famine could be radically reduced but there are various factors that could bring worse famine than ever.
 - Earthquakes do not seem to be increasing.
 - There is a real danger of greater worldwide pestilences and pandemics.
2. There is a great deal of **persecution** of Christians in the world and potential for much more. Persecution has increased in the last century or so. The present trend towards marginalizing Christians in Britain could easily turn into real persecution.
3. In the western world, particularly Europe, there is **extensive turning away from Christianity** (though there is remarkable growth of Christianity in Africa, Asia and Latin America). The fairly swift decline in Europe illustrates that a massive turning away from Christianity can take place within a fairly short period of time.
4. There has been an increase in the number of **false messiahs**.
5. The modern missionary movement and global communications mean that the **world** has been very extensively **evangelized**.

6. Whereas we don't know exactly what Jesus meant by "**cosmic disturbances**" the astronomical community is very concerned and active with respect to asteroids or other near earth object hitting earth with disastrous consequences. What the scientists describe make what Jesus predicts seem very feasible.
7. The **return of the Jewish people** to their ancient land, including Jerusalem, is clearly significant in God's purposes, as I understand Scripture. (I am, nevertheless a *critical* friend of Israel and deeply concerned about justice for the Palestinians).
8. We do not know the details about the **Antichrist** but there are very significant facts which show that the world is much more ready for him than it was a century or so ago.
9. The fact that the **modern globalized economic system could collapse quickly** ('Rome' collapsing 'in one hour') seems quite clear.

All these signs and the evidence recorded below point to the one who says: "Yes, I am coming soon."

These are the conclusions of this paper. However you respond to them, I hope you will read the detailed evidence and comments.

We now turn to consider the signs of the end, which Jesus taught us to note, in the light of current events and trends. I have divided the signs into three sections:

I. The preliminary (repeated) signs

Wars, uprisings (Matt 24:6-18)
 Famines (Matt 24:6-18)
 Earthquakes (Matt 24:6-18)
 Pestilences (Luke 21:11)

II. The intermediate signs

Persecution (Mt 24:9ff)
 Turning away from the faith (Mt 24:10)
 False prophets and messiahs (Mt 24:11, 24)
 Worldwide evangelism (Mt 24:14)

III. The imminent signs

Cosmic disturbances (Mt 24:29)
 The Jewish people regaining control of Jerusalem (Lk 21:24).
 The rebellion and deceptive 'signs and wonders' of the man of lawlessness (Antichrist) who proclaims himself to be God (2 Thess 2:1-12)
 The sudden financial collapse of the world system ('Babylon') (Rev 18)

The preliminary, repeated signs of the end Matt 24:6-18; Luke 21:11
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There are those signs which Jesus refers to as the "beginning of birth pains" (Matt 24:8). They are events which happen frequently in the world: *wars, uprisings, famines, earthquakes (Mt 24:6-7), pestilences (Lk 21:11)*. I have tended to use the illustration that some motorway signs refer to a far distant destination and are repeated at regular intervals as a reminder to the driver. These early repeating signs should be like that for the Christian. They are not indicating the end is literally about to happen. In speaking of these signs Jesus says: "Such things must happen, but the end is still to come" (Matthew 24:6). However, it could be said that they indicate that the end is imminent in another sense, i.e. Jesus is always ready and waiting in the wings, ready to come onto the stage of history.

One could argue that these signs might become more obvious as the End approaches and there are some passages in the Book of Revelation which could be interpreted that way. I deal with this suggestion in what follows.

1. Wars, uprisings,

Clearly, the main interest Christians should have about war is how to prevent it and how to help the victims. But Jesus

also did say that war was a reminder of the end times.

Is war increasing?

Some Christians have a tendency to say that war is increasing and this increase is a sign of the end. However, quite apart from Jesus not actually speaking of the 'sign' of war increasing, the idea that war is increasing *overall* seems not *at present* to be borne out by the facts. One of the reasons why war may *seem* to have increased is that we now have global media which report each conflict graphically into our living rooms.

At the end of 2011 Joshua Goldstein, Emeritus Professor of International Relations at American University, pointed out that there were far less deaths from war per annum in the previous ten years than in each of the previous hundred years (an average of 55,000 p.a. compared with 100,000 p.a. in the 1990s and 180,000 p.a. from 1950-1989 – many more die indirectly as a result of war). Also global military spending declined significantly at the end of the 20th century, after awesome increases in the previous four decades. Goldstein wrote: "Far from being an age of killer anarchy, the 20 years since the Cold War ended have been an era of rapid progress toward peace." He gives various reasons:

- Wars between large national armies has all but disappeared since the Korean War.
- A growth in economic interdependence between nations. This is one of the reasons why China is relatively peaceful since the death of Mao.
- The growth of international organizations which are mutually supportive of each other and of peace within the community of democratic countries. For example the United Nations' 100,000 deployed peacekeepers have measurably improved the success of peace agreements in civil wars.
- War no longer reallocates territory. Since shortly after World War II, virtually no borders have changed by force, and no member of the United Nations has disappeared through conquest.
- There is a growing repugnance toward institutionalized violence in many parts of the world.¹

Others point out, though, that 20 years is a short time and although the UN was set up to prevent another world war some 135 wars have taken place and there were 200 million war deaths in the 20th century. In particular, democratic societies do have a tendency to go to war against autocracies. At the end of 2011 there were 18 wars taking place around the world. Also, although repugnance against institutionalised violence may have grown, it is worth remembering that 21 years after World War I "the war to end all wars" which was too terrible to repeat, World War II broke out.

Goldstein quotes peace researcher Randall Forsberg who in 1997 said: "The vanishing risk of great-power war has opened the door to a previously unimaginable future -- a future in which war is no longer socially-sanctioned and is rare, brief, and small in scale." However Goldstein himself wrote:

The overall peaceful trend since 1990 may be a harbinger of even greater peace, or just an interlude before new and more terrible wars. It may be robust or fragile. It may result from understandable causes or from an unknown confluence of events. But, for now, peace is increasing. Year by year, we are winning the war on war.

Another argument I do not make is that reductions in war are inevitable, irreversible, or part of an immutable trend. On the contrary, history tells us that the gains humanity makes in building peace are generally fragile, reversible, and require ongoing effort to sustain. Shortly before World War I, British journalist and activist Norman Angell published *The Great Illusion* to great public acclaim. He argued that economic interdependence, with wealth deriving not from territory but credit and commerce, had made war and conquest self-defeating and pointless. At that time, relative peace had prevailed for almost four decades since 1871— less peace than is sometimes claimed ... but still relative peace by historical standards. A really massive great-power war had not occurred in nearly a century. It was easy to think, in 1910, that war had withered away. Instead, the World Wars followed, even though they created the economic devastation in Europe that Angell had foreseen.

..... So, no, the culmination of today's hopeful trends in the permanent end of war is not inevitable, but neither is their reversal. We have good reason to worry, in a world of more and more powerful weapons, that a new outbreak of major war would be more devastating than ever. But at the same time we have good reason for hope, that such a disaster need not happen. World peace is not preordained and inevitable, but neither is a return to large-scale war.²

Political psychologist James Blight and Robert McNamara, former World Bank president and U. S. Secretary of Defense project the level of warfare forward in the twenty-first century based on population growth, and suggest a "speculative" but "conservative" estimate of "at least 300 million" fatalities from war in the twenty-first century, of which perhaps 75 million would be military. That is to say, the new century would see an average of 3 million war

deaths per year, with 750,000 of them military deaths. They acknowledge the tremendous uncertainties in war data and difficulties in projecting forward a hundred years, but note that “our projections . . . may well be *underestimates!*”³

There are various negative factors in the situation today:

Terrorism

The Global Peace Index for 2011 report states: “[2011] has seen the world become less peaceful for the third year in a row - and highlights what it says is a continuing threat of terrorism Despite the decade long War on Terror, the likelihood of terrorist attacks has increased in the past year in 29 countries.” The 2012 Global Peace Index reports that: “Peacefulness has returned to approximately the levels seen in 2007, but while external measures of peacefulness have improved, there has been a rise in internal conflict. This is particularly noticeable in the rise in fatalities from terrorist acts which have more than trebled since 2003.”⁴

Civil unrest

The 1994 U.N. Human Development Report stated: “The world can never be at peace unless people have security in their daily lives. Future conflicts may often be within nations rather than between them-with their origins buried deep in growing socio-economic deprivation and disparities. The search for security in such a milieu lies in development, not in arms.”⁵ People are rising up against growing inequality and abusive power everywhere: in China, Central Asia and the Middle East

Nuclear war

It is true that the 1994 U.N. Human Development Report stated: “The world is safer today from the threat of nuclear holocaust. With the end of the cold war and the conclusion of several disarmament agreements, it is difficult to recall that so many generations since the Second World War grew up with the constant fear of a sudden, unpredictable nuclear suicide.”

The number of nuclear warheads has decreased significantly. In the mid-1980s, there were over 70,000 warheads and in 2000 32,512. In 2012 the Federation of American Scientists said there are an estimated 19,000 (Russia 10,000, United States 8,000, France 300, China 240, United Kingdom 225, Israel 80, Pakistan 70-110, India 80-100, North Korea less than 10).⁶ However the destructive power of these smaller numbers should not be underestimated.

Iran is seeking to build nuclear weapons and threatens to attack Israel. Pakistan, not the most stable country in the world, has recurring disputes with India. Pakistani experts are reported to be working on a secret nuclear programme with Saudi Arabia. Then there is always the real danger of terrorists acquiring nuclear weapons.

Other factors

There are other factors which could lead to war in the future: unprecedented population growth, climate change, and resource shortages.

2. Famines

Jesus also foretold that another of the preliminary and repeated signs of the end would be famine. He said: “There will be famines” (Matt 24:7). Famine may be caused by crop failure, overpopulation, war, control of resources and income by military, political and economic elites, land being controlled by absentee landlords and their agents producing meat and butter not for the locals but to ship overseas or government policies (including the policies of rich countries). A good deal of malnutrition is not caused by famine as such, but rather by poverty. It seems appropriate to include it all under Jesus’ prediction. The whole issue of world poverty should, of course, be a major concern for Christians. As far as hunger is concerned, the situation is still very serious. The world produces enough food for everyone but:

- A fifth of the developing world's population goes hungry every night, a quarter lacks access to even a basic necessity like safe drinking water. It would take just 0.2% of the global income to raise them out of poverty. The 2010 UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) estimate, the most recent, says that 925 million people were undernourished in 2010.

- A quarter of the world's children are stunted because of malnutrition (it was 40% in 1990). In developing countries this figure is 50%
- Poor nutrition plays a role in at least half of the 10.9 million child deaths each year--five million deaths.
- Children who survive long-term malnutrition still suffer – their bodies and brains don't develop properly.⁷

The UN estimates the global population could reach 10 billion by the 2080s and 16 billion by the end of the century (although the latter is a controversially high figure). Oxfam calculates it will be 9.2 billion in 40 years time and the FAO says we will need to produce twice as much food to cope. Oxfam has also predicted that the price of staple foods will double in the next 20 years, which will mainly affect the poor.

However the FAO also says that it would be possible to feed the increased numbers, given radical changes in worldwide government policies. World agriculture produces 17 percent more calories per person today than it did 30 years ago, despite a 70 percent population increase. This is enough to provide everyone in the world with at least 2,720 kilocalories (kcal) per person per day. The problem is that many people in the world do not have sufficient land to grow, or income to purchase, enough food.

However it should be remembered that dire predictions in the past have not come to pass. In 1798 Thomas Malthus predicted in 1798 that human reproduction would end in famine and catastrophe. But the Agricultural Revolution increased food production radically. In 1968, biologist Paul Ehrlich in his bestseller, *The Population Bomb*, predicted the deaths of hundreds of millions in the 1970s. He accepts that he underestimated the "green revolution" but he is even more pessimistic now and, estimating there is only a 10% chance of avoiding a collapse of global civilisation. He added: "We could support a lot more people on the planet if humans were willing to share equally, but they don't: we want to design a world where everybody can lead a decent life without everybody being fair."⁸ It is worth noting, though, that from 1970-2005 agricultural productivity rose by several times the rate required to feed nine billion people in 2050. Whether food will actually reach those in need is another matter.

Enough crops can be grown to feed the planet. But spiralling grain prices, stock market speculation, climate change and corrupt and failing governments have left almost a billion people facing starvation.

Climate change is a major factor which is going to make the earth less efficient for farming. Hurricanes will increase in intensity, and storms, floods and droughts will become more frequent. Changes in temperature and rainfall will affect what crops can be grown and productivity. It will also increase animal and plant pests and diseases. The FAO warned: 'Slow-onset climate changes are expected to have potentially catastrophic effects on food production in many developing countries, particularly between 2050 and 2100.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) predicts that within ten years in parts of Africa, farmers who depend on the rain to water their crops will see yields fall by up to 50 per cent. "Agricultural production, including access to food, in many African countries is predicted to be severely compromised. This would further adversely affect food security and exacerbate malnutrition," it warns.⁹

In 2009 Oxfam International, published a report in which it said: "Climate change's most savage impact on humanity in the near future is likely to be in the increase in hunger ... Millions of farmers will have to give up traditional crops as they experience changes in the seasons that they and their ancestors have depended on. Climate-related hunger [may become] the defining human tragedy of this century."¹⁰

There were some 37 famines recorded in the 20th century and 17 already in the 21st century. The number of hungry people reduced from 1969 to 1997 but then sharply rose by over 200 million until 2009, reducing by 2010. The increase has been due to neglect of agriculture relevant to very poor people by governments and international agencies; the worldwide economic crisis, and the significant increase of food prices.

In the 21st century there have been (or are) famines in the following places: Congo (1998–2004), Zimbabwe (2000–2009), Sudan (2003), Malawi (2005), Niger (2005-2006), Somalia, Djibouti, Ethiopia and Kenya (2006 & 2008), Myanmar (2008) North Korea (2008), Afghanistan (2008), Bangladesh (2008), East Africa (2008), Tajikistan (2008), Kenya (2009), Sahel (2010) Somalia and neighbouring countries (2011) and Mali and Niger (2012). Niger is now one of the hungriest places on earth. Some 80 per cent of harvests have failed. Locusts have destroyed crops. Food prices

have tripled. The poorest families have been reduced to eating leaves to survive. The lives of six million children are in the balance.

The picture over famine is complex. It would be possible to reduce it radically or even eradicate it but there are various factors which could not only prevent this happening but could mean that famine will become much worse in the future. (It should be remembered that Jesus did not speak of famine increasing but only of it being a preliminary and repeated sign of the end). Clearly the exponential increase in world population means that many more people suffer in areas of deprivation than previously.

3. Earthquakes

Earthquakes killed an average of 50,184 people per annum between 2000 and 2008.¹¹ The US Geological Survey (USGS) estimate that there are over a million earthquakes per annum but most go undetected, either because they are in very remote areas or because they are very small.¹² The National Earthquake Information Center (NEIC) records some 50 earthquakes a day – approximately 20,000 per annum.¹³ In a recent 30 day period the USGS recorded 609 earthquakes, 12 of them more than magnitude 6.¹⁴

As with other preliminary, repeated signs mentioned in Matthew and Luke, some people claim that there is a growing number of earthquakes. Again, Jesus did not speak about any increase..

The NEIC records from 1900 onwards show that there are likely to be 16 major earthquakes per year, including 15 over magnitude 7 and one over magnitude 8. The data shows that this was only exceeded in 8 years (1976, 1990, 1995, 1999, 2007, 2009, 2010 and 2011).¹⁵ In 2010 there were 24 earthquakes over magnitude 7. The number of earthquakes over magnitude 6 has stayed relatively constant.

One reason why it seems that earthquakes are increasing is because of a larger number of seismograph stations (from 350 in 1930 to over 8000 today) and an improvement in global communication.¹⁶ Before the 20th century records of earthquakes are much more limited. However, from the records we have since 1700, five of the largest earthquakes (over magnitude 8) have been in the 20th century and three in the 21st century.¹⁷

4. Pestilences

Another preliminary, repeated signs of the End spoken of by Jesus was “pestilences.” Obviously, many major advances in medicine, including preventative medicine, have transformed human health, especially in the developed world. Nevertheless, the danger of what Jesus referred to as ‘pestilences’ is still very much with us.

1. Modern diseases

Researchers have compiled a database of 335 infectious diseases first acknowledged as a potential threat between 1940 and 2004.¹⁸

The World Health Organisation lists various disease outbreaks. The most extensive in the 21st century are Avian influenza (in 25 countries 2003-12), Cholera (in 36 countries 2000-11), Dengue fever (in 16 countries) Ebola (in 7 countries 2000-11), Meningitis (in 29 countries 2000-12), Plague (in 8 countries 2001-10), Polio (in 25 countries 2000-11), Rift Valley fever (in 8 countries 2000-10), SARS (severe acute respiratory syndrome - in numerous countries 2003-4) and Yellow fever (in 22 countries 2000-11). The WHO lists a further 46 diseases including Anthrax, Botulism, Hepatitis E, Influenza, Lassa fever, Legionellosis, Malaria, and Swine flu.¹⁹

Nathan Wolfe is Visiting Professor in Human Biology at Stanford University and director of the Global Viral Forecasting Initiative. He stresses the importance of Ebola, SARS, Bird Flu, HIV, influenza and Malaria as potential pandemics. He added that there is a possibility of viruses such as Bird Flu (which didn't affect many humans despite concerns) mutating into a form which could seriously affect humans.

AIDS has now surpassed the Black Death and could kill 60 million people by 2015.²⁰

2. The danger of pandemics

Health authorities are alert to the continuing danger of pandemics. For example, the World Health Organisation (WHO) Global Outbreak Alert and Response Network (GOARN) states: “Today, there is growing recognition that an

outbreak anywhere can potentially represent an emergency of international public health concern. Outbreaks threaten the health of the world's population. They require regional and global alert and response mechanisms to ensure rapid access to technical advice and resources and to support national public health capacity. No single institution or country has all of the capacities to respond to international public health emergencies caused by epidemics and by new and emerging infectious diseases.²¹

Sally Osberg, CEO of the Skoll Foundation, which encourages and supports innovators who seek to solve the world's most pressing problems, said: "Pandemics pose an enormous threat to us all. Often, by the time a new virus is discovered, it's too late to contain it."²²

Writing in the Wall Street Journal in May 2009, Larry Brilliant, an epidemiologist, and chairman of the National Biosurveillance Advisory Subcommittee, stated: "We might be entering an Age of Pandemics. In our lifetimes, or our children's lifetimes, we will face a broad array of dangerous emerging 21st-century diseases, man-made or natural, brand-new or old, newly resistant to our current vaccines and antiviral drugs Naturally occurring diseases with pandemic potential are much more ubiquitous and more certain to occur. Over the last decades, we have seen more than three dozen new infectious diseases appear, some of which could kill millions of people with one or two unlucky gene mutations or one or two unfavorable environmental changes."²³

3. *Factors favouring pandemics*

There are various factors which raise the danger of pandemics:

a. *Global Communications*

We now live in a global village and so the possibility of infection being spread around the world is high. One example proves the point. A flight from Buenos Aires to Los Angeles stopped in Lima in 1992, and picked up some seafood infected with the cholera then making the rounds in Peru. As a result, dozens of passengers who arrived in Los Angeles, some of whom then changed planes and flew on to Nevada and even as far as Japan, found that they had contracted cholera. Within days that single airplane spread cholera 10,000 miles around the whole rim of the Pacific Basin.²⁴

b. *Increased contacts between humans and animals*

Scientists are aware that many diseases spread to humans from animals. In April 2009 Scientific American reported the likely sources of various diseases, namely AIDS (from chimpanzees), Hepatitis B (from apes), Influenza A (from wild birds), Plague (from rodents), Dengue fever (from Old World primates), East African and West African sleeping sickness (from wild and domestic ruminants), vivax malaria (from Asian macaques), Yellow fever (from African primates) and Chagas' disease (from many wild and domestic animals). Bird flu, SARS, West Nile, Monkey-pox and Ebola also came from animals.²⁵

Scholars such as Mark Woolhouse, Professor of Infectious Disease Epidemiology at the University of Edinburgh in Scotland, have found at least 868 human pathogens that infect both animals and humans, although in the last 40 years, only HIV has become a pandemic, with some 40 million people affected,²⁶ rising to possibly 60 million in three years time.

Increased contact between humans and animals has various causes:

- *Global warming*

Global warming affects agriculture which leads, amongst other things, to farmers cutting down jungle. These deforested areas served as barriers to viruses which pass from animals to humans. But as temperatures rise and seashores change animals move towards centres of human population. So more humans come into contact with animals and their viruses.

A 2009 Oxfam report on climate change says many diseases are already migrating as temperatures rise. Malaria, dengue fever, river blindness and yellow fever are all considered highly likely to increase their distribution, it says.²⁷

Larry Brilliant reports that: "The non-native tiger mosquito, which can spread dengue, yellow fever and encephalitis, is expanding its range across North America and is set to displace more benign native species on the back

of climate change. Now able to thrive at higher altitudes, malaria-carrying mosquitoes, which cause 1.5 million to 2 millions deaths a year, are about to spread into northern Europe and the highlands of tropical Africa.”²⁸

- *Commercial deforestation*

Obviously, deforestation is caused for commercial reasons as well, and this has the same effect as that caused by global warming.

- *World poverty*

The price of food causes poor people to eat more wild animals. Larry Brilliant wrote that in 2008 Africans consumed nearly 700 million wild animals, about two billion kilograms of “bush meat.”²⁹

- *Population*

Paul Nurse, President of the Royal Society, in the report *People and the Planet* (April 2012) writes: “Rapid and widespread changes in the world’s human population, coupled with unprecedented levels of consumption present profound challenges to human health and wellbeing, and the natural environment.”³⁰

Communicable diseases can easily be transferred from one person to another in an overpopulated area. The WHO reported that “In 2009, for the first time in human history, more than half of the world’s population resides in urban areas. In 33 countries, globally, 80% or more of the population live in urban areas. Urban growth has outpaced the ability of governments to build essential infrastructures, and one in three urban dwellers lives in slums or informal settlements.”³¹

4. *Factory farming*

In April 2008 the Pew Commission published the report of its two and a half-year examination of industrial farm animal production (IFAP) and concluded that it often poses unacceptable risks to public health (as well as to the environment and the welfare of the animals themselves). They stated:

“Commissioners have determined that the negative effects of the IFAP system are too great and the scientific evidence is too strong to ignore....

Animals in such close confinement, along with some of the feed and animal management methods employed in the system, increase pathogen risks and magnify opportunities for transmission from animals to humans. This increased risk is due to at least three factors: prolonged worker contact with animals, increased pathogen transmission within a herd or flock, and the increased opportunities for the generation of antimicrobial resistant bacteria (due to imprudent antimicrobial use) or new strains of viruses. Stresses induced by confinement may also increase the likelihood of infection and illness in animal populations.”

Communities near IFAP facilities are subject to air emissions that can significantly affect certain segments of the population.”³²

About three-quarters of emerging infectious diseases—from H1N1 flu to West Nile virus—are produced by disease-causing organisms (mostly viruses) in animals. On a macro level, it’s known that ecological change—from intensive pig farming to the clearing of rain forests to the growth of crowded megacities—ushers new germs into our lives.³³

In August 2003 the American Public Health Association (APHA) issued a *Precautionary Moratorium on New Concentrated Animal Feed Operations*. They referred to the fact that: “Numerous studies document serious respiratory problems among CAFO [concentrated animal feeding operations] workers, including chronic bronchitis and non-allergic asthma in about 25 percent of confinement swine workers..... Scientists convened first by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and more recently by the University of Iowa and Iowa State University, agree CAFO air emissions may constitute a hazard to public health, in addition to workers’ health.”

It added that “The emerging scientific consensus is that antibiotics given to food animals contribute to antibiotic resistance transmitted to humans”

It recorded that “moratoria on new CAFO construction have been called for by the Michigan State Medical Society, the Canadian Medical Association as well as local boards of health, moratoria generally citing existing scientific

evidence for threats to worker health and public health.”

APHA resolved to “urge federal, state and local governments and public health agencies to impose a moratorium on new Concentrated Animal Feed Operations until additional scientific data on the attendant risks to public health have been collected and uncertainties resolved.”³⁴

Drug-resistant microbes

In December 2009 the Council of the European Union published *Council Conclusions on innovative incentives for effective Antibiotics* in which it stated that it: “Recognises that the spread of antibiotic resistance is a major threat to public health security worldwide which requires action at all levels. The disease burden related to antibiotic resistant bacteria that cannot be effectively treated with first- or even second-line medicinal products, is rapidly increasing in the world.”³⁵

A report of the British Society for Antimicrobial Chemotherapy Initiative said: “The developed world has seen an explosion in the incidence and reporting of multi-resistant drug infections both in hospital and community settings.”³⁶

In the same year the WHO referred to “Antibiotic resistance” as “one of the three greatest threats to human health.”³⁷ Then in 2011 it reported that about 440 000 new cases of multidrug-resistant tuberculosis emerge annually, causing at least 150 000 deaths and that resistance to earlier generation antimalarial medicines is widespread in most malaria-endemic countries. It added: “A high percentage of hospital-acquired infections are caused by highly resistant bacteria.”³⁸

On 20th November 2011 *Medical News Today* reported: “The world is moving towards the unthinkable scenario of untreatable infections as fewer antibacterial drugs are discovered and more and more people are becoming resistant to existing drugs, researchers from University of Birmingham, England, reported in *The Lancet Infectious Diseases Journal*. The article coincides with the European Antibiotics Awareness Day, and warns about the urgency of the situation and the actions needed to turn it around.”

It added: “Various factors have contributed to a dramatic decrease in industries losing interest in pursuing antimicrobial drug development, including pharmaceutical company mergers, small profit margins of these drugs, as they usually consist of short-term treatments with the ability to develop resistance quickly, as well as the burden of regulatory barriers that have to be overcome to achieve a drug's approval.

Put simply: The pharmaceutical industry finds that after spending a lot of money developing a new drug, they are then faced with many regulatory barriers, only to find that when their new medication is finally approved, it is not effective for long because the bacterium rapidly develops resistance to it.”³⁹

5. *Bioterrorism*

A few years ago Martin Rees, Master of Trinity College, Cambridge and head of the Royal Society, predicted that bioterror or bioerror would unleash a catastrophic event claiming one million lives in the next two decades.⁴⁰

Intermediate signs of the times

- *Persecution (Mt 24:9ff)*
- *Turning away from the faith (Mt 24:10)*
- *False prophets and messiahs (Mt 24:11, 24)*
- *Worldwide evangelism (Mt 24:14)*

As stated above, this paper will seek to read what is going on in society and the world around us to see how it relates to what the Bible teaches about these eight signs in particular.

Persecution (Mt 24:9ff)

Jesus foretold that after the early, recurring signs reminding us of his return – false messiahs, wars, famines and earthquakes – there would be persecution. “Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me.” (Matt 24:9).

Clearly, there has been persecution down through the centuries (David Barrett and his colleagues say that since the time of Jesus 71 million Christians have been martyred for Christ⁴¹) but he seems to be saying it will get worse later in the era before his return. Is there any evidence that persecution is getting worse?

Has persecution increased?

The 2011 report of Aid to the Church in Need entitled *Persecuted and forgotten?*⁴² asked that question. (ACN is a Catholic charity founded in 1947. It is now a universal pastoral charity of the Catholic Church, with thousands of projects all over the world). The report asks: “Taken as a whole then, is persecution of Christians getting worse?” It continues: “The findings of this report show that the situation is mixed. However, significant developments in key countries point to the inescapable conclusion that – especially in the Middle East and some other countries – Christianity is under threat as never before and could yet disappear. Research into the total number of Christians suffering persecution gives varying statistics but all of them are alarming.”

The report comments on 33 countries and concludes that “in key countries the violence and intimidation of the faithful have manifestly worsened. And this is noticeable even compared with the situation of three years ago, covered in the 2008 *Persecuted and Forgotten?*” It asks the question: “Will future historians say of us that we were firsthand witnesses to the extinguishing of Christianity in the very countries where the light of our faith first took hold?”

In a House of Lords debate about “Christians in the Middle East” on December 9th 2011 initiated by the Archbishop of Canterbury he said that “the position of Christians in the region is more vulnerable than it has been for centuries.”⁴³

Pope Benedict XVI warned in September 2007: “Churches in the Middle East are threatened in their very existence.”⁴⁴

In *World Christian Trends AD 30-AD 2200* (publ. 2001) *Global Diagram 16* David Barratt and Todd Johnson record major martyrdom situations over 20 centuries: those with over 100,000 martyrs each, those with over 500,000 martyrs each and those with over 1 million martyrs each. They also record the following significant facts:

- 61% of the major martyrdoms with over 100,000 martyrs each have been in the 20th century (plus 2 in the late 19th century).
- 87.5% of the major martyrdoms with over 500,000 martyrs each have been in the 20th century and
- 66% of the major martyrdoms with over 1 million martyrs each have been in the 20th century.

Although Barrett and Johnson are experts, these figures are controversial, including averages and estimates, and incomplete but they probably show a reliable indication that persecution has very significantly increased in the last century or so.

What are the reasons for persecution increasing?

There is no getting away from the fact that much of the growing persecution of Christians happens in a Muslim context. Before continuing, let me make a few important preliminary comments:

1. Islamophobia – a persistently negative and suspicious attitude towards Muslims - is not a Christian attitude. There should be mutual respect and understanding between faith groups, however major the theological disagreements are. Interfaith dialogue is important in the modern world and I myself have been and remain involved in it.
2. Many Muslims disapprove of the persecution of Christians by fellow Muslims.
3. As Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sachs put it in the House of Lords debate: “Today, the majority of victims of Islamist violence are Muslim, and shall we not shed tears for them, too?” Similarly, the Bishop of Exeter said: “the primary victims of religious extremism in the Muslim world are other Muslims.” On the other hand Lord Wood of Anfield referred to “the startling fact revealed by the Aid to the Church in Need report earlier [in 2011] that 75 per cent of all religious persecution in the world is carried out against Christians.

4. The western world bears major responsibility for the negative attitude towards Christianity by many Muslims.

In the House of Lords debate Lord Parekh said: “By and large, Islam has been tolerant, even respectful, of Christianity. For hundreds of years, its record in the Middle East has been fairly good and in some respects even better than the record of Europe with respect to Muslims. Why, then, have these things [discrimination, harassment and violent attacks against Christians] begun to happen during the past 30 or 40 years?”

He gave five answers: Firstly, countries want unity and so see the country as belonging to the majority faith group.

Secondly, religious minorities tend to relate to the current regime for safety’s sake, so when the regime changes they may be scapegoated.

Thirdly, western foreign policy tends to encourage extremism. Lord Parekh mentioned that the Bishop in Jerusalem had warned Tony Blair a month before the invasion of Iraq: “You will be responsible for emptying Iraq, the homeland of Abraham, of Christians.” Sadly, that prophecy has begun to be fulfilled.

[We might add here that the sub-Christian actions of people like US Pastor Terry Jones’s exacerbate the situation. After he proposed burning copies of the Qur’an some 20,000 Muslims burnt down the Church of North India’s Tyndale Biscoe School, whose students were all Muslim. Several other Christian schools were also attacked. We can also quote Stephen Zunes who is professor of politics at the University of San Francisco, who says: “It is important to remember that most of the “sectarian” conflicts associated with the Arab world, particularly targeting Christians, are a relatively new phenomenon. With the exception of a few brief periods, Christians lived at peace with their Muslim neighbors in the region for many centuries. Indeed, the Muslim world was generally far more tolerant of religious minorities than Christian Europe. Along with Jews, Muslims considered Christians to be “people of the Book” due to their common worship of the God of Abraham. Indeed, “Allah” is simply the Arabic word for God, spoken both in mosques and in Arabic-speaking Christian churches. The advent of modern Western colonialism in the Middle East a century ago, however, followed by more recent U.S. interventions, has severely weakened this traditional tolerance. As result, it is important to remember that the plight of Arab Christians today comes not out of any intolerance inherent in the Islamic tradition, but as a direct outgrowth of policies by Western powers, including the United States.”]

Fourthly, some governments encourage religious division for their own purposes, no least to give the impression they are the only hope of preventing interreligious chaos.

Fifthly, there are extremist groups such as Al Qaeda. In the same debate Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon, himself a Muslim, said: “As much as some in the West equate all Muslims with extremists, there are those in the Middle East who are suspicious of the West. That is prevalent in many Islamic parts of the world. It is based on an extreme hatred of the western imperialism and the perceived unqualified support for Israel. Unfortunately and tragically, this has served on occasion as a pretext to scapegoat indigenous Christians.”

We might also add a sixth reason which is the antagonism towards Muslims converting to Christianity. This can lead to the convert being killed. It also means that Muslims are antagonistic towards ‘proselytising’ i.e. evangelism by Christians. Sometimes the accusation of proselytising is false but used as an excuse to persecute Christians.

The *Persecuted and forgotten?* report states: “Taken as a whole, a politicisation of religion has widened and deepened the problem of Christian persecution.”

In the table below I have outlined the persecution taking place against Christians in 43 countries of the world. These countries are the ones highlighted by organizations which report persecution, although persecution is relatively less serious in places like Cuba, Lebanon, Morocco and Russia. Most of the 43 countries are Muslim but there is also persecution by Buddhists in Bangladesh, Bhutan, Sri Lanka and by Hindus in India.

Persecution of Christians 2012

Afghanistan	Increased media reports of violence and threats against Christians, possibly associated with reports of US soldiers involved in proselytism. Human rights and religious freedom organisations noted a dramatic deterioration in attitudes towards non-Muslims. The government does not intervene when families murder a family member for converting (‘apostasizing’) to Christianity.
Algeria	There has been an upsurge in court cases and acts of intimidation against Christian converts because of allegations of proselytism even though the constitution defends the right to freedom of thought and religious practice within defined limitations. Early 2008, 30 churches were forcibly closed, but by the end of 2009, at least 20 had

	reopened despite not obtaining the requisite registration. In December 2009 20 Muslims burgled and desecrated a newly-built Protestant church used by Christian converts. Further attacks took place and eventually everything was burnt – furniture, Bibles, hymnbooks and a cross. In 2012 thousands of Muslims attacked a Coptic church, and demanded the death of its pastor
Azerbaijan	Religious freedom is restricted. All worship gatherings must be officially registered and the registration process can take years. Some denominations are routinely denied. Religious literature is also censored and this has prevented thousands of Bibles and other Christian literature from entering the country.
Bangladesh	In 2009 Dipal Barua, one of the region’s most respected human rights activists, declared that “attacks against minorities are increasing at a staggering rate”. Fundamentalists (both Muslim and Buddhist) have been blamed for a growing number of atrocities and acts of intimidation against Christians and other minorities. Incidents include killings, rape, torture, attacks on places of worship, destruction of homes, forced evictions and desecration of items of worship. In February 2010 a Christian worker was beaten by about 20 people for showing a film about Jesus in a private home.
Belarus	Christian meetings have been raided, Christians’ property seized and they have been fined for ‘unauthorised’ religious activities.
Bhutan	There is harassment and discrimination by the authorities. Proselytizing is forbidden, and there are limits on building non-Buddhist religious buildings.
Bosnia–Herzegovina	Some reports indicated that violence against Christians had declined but other sources showed that harassment of Christians and attacks on churches remains a serious problem.
Burma (Myanmar)	There is mounting opposition to Christianity with the forced closure of a large number of Protestant churches in 2010, intimidation and outright persecution. In 2009 a new law effectively banned independent ‘house churches’. Many Christian groups were forced underground after the regime repeatedly blocked their applications for churches and chapels. Officials ordered owners of apartment buildings and conference facilities not to rent their properties to religious groups.
China	Restrictions are enforced at a provincial level and so are inconsistent. Unregistered churches continue to be raided, sometimes with violence causing serious injury, but when they try to register, are prevented by the Religious Affairs Office. Priests and pastors are still being held in prison or forced labour camps. Christian human rights activist and lawyer Gao Zhishen was imprisoned and described how officers urinated on him and repeatedly prodded his body, mouth and genitals with electric shock batons. Gao wrote that other methods used were too graphic and “horrible” to describe.
Cuba	There have been improvements in the situation. Some detainees have been released. The communist government openly recognised the Cuban Church as an intermediary and mediator in social and political issues. The regime also lifted the ban on church services in prisons. However Christians are not allowed to work in education, health and social services. There is harassment of Christian groups not recognised by the state and there is still no major breakthrough in the return of Church buildings confiscated by the regime 40 years ago.
Democratic Republic of the Congo	Christians have suffered in the violence although religion has played little part in the matter. In January 2009 The Lord’s Resistance Army torched a church crowded with worshippers during a prayer vigil.
Egypt	The government refuses to allow converts to Christianity to change their religious status on state issued identification cards, and they prohibit the building or renovation of churches unless official approval is received. There has been some mob violence and murder. Christians, like other activists and protestors have suffered at the hands of the authorities. On October 9 th 2011 Coptic Christians gathered amidst hostile Muslim crowds in Cairo to protest the destruction of a church near Aswan. Violence broke out and 27 Christians were killed, 14 of them being crushed by military armoured vehicles. Three of the drivers were arrested by the Egyptian Army and put on trial. On the other hand five days later it was reported that “At least 2,000 people rallied in Cairo in a show of unity between Muslims and Christians and to express anger at the ruling military council after 25 people died when a protest by Coptic Christians led to clashes with the army.” Also “Thousands of Muslims turned up in droves outside churches around the country for the Coptic Christmas Eve mass, in solidarity with a beleaguered Coptic community offering their bodies, and lives, as ‘human shields,’ making a pledge to collectively fight the threat of Islamic militants and build an Egypt free from sectarian strife.”
Eritrea	In 2009 the US Secretary of State noted: “particularly severe violations of religious freedom”, and it still continues. This includes harassment, indefinite detention without charge, arrests during religious services as well as “forced recantations of faith and torture

	of religious prisoners". There are probably more than 3,000 Christians imprisoned for their faith, many held in underground cells or transport containers. Evidence points strongly to prisoners dying from torture and lack of medical attention. Reportedly there are several holes in the desert where Christians are kept, who only receive three pieces of bread, a cup of tea in the morning and three cups of water a day. Temperatures can reach 49°C (120°F). There are no toilet facilities or medical care.
India	Hindu extremists perpetrated severe anti-Christian violence in 2007 and 2008 in Orissa. 70 churches and other Christian institutions were attacked and 600 homes were destroyed. After a Hindu monk was assassinated Christians were falsely accused which led to the torching of 4,640 houses, 252 churches and 13 educational institutions. Up to 500 people may have died. 54,000 were made homeless. Two years later many Christians were too afraid to return home because of threats of renewed violence and forced conversions. In September 2010 after US Pastor Terry Jones's proposed burning copies of the <i>Qur'an</i> a crowd of up to 20,000 burnt down the Church of North India's Tyndale Biscoe School, whose students were all Muslim. Several other Christian schools were also attacked. The states of Gujarat, Orissa, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, and Himachal Pradesh enforce anti-conversion laws which restrict the freedom of Hindus to convert to other religions.
Indonesia	Indonesia's President is seeking to tackle religious intolerance and the rise of militant extremism, but attacks and acts of intimidation against religious minorities have continued. There has been a rise in Islamic fundamentalism since 2009 which is eroding the long-prevailing communal tolerance and religious freedom and there have been many acts of violence, ranging from church buildings burnt to the ground, to authorities cancelling Easter services at very short notice under pressure from local fundamentalists. The Islamists' stated aim is to completely eliminate Christianity in the country. Militia groups are also trying to stop reconciliation efforts between Muslims and Christians in an attempt to further marginalize Christians.
Iran	Iran is ruled by Shia Muslims who place minority groups such as Sunni Muslims and Christians at a distinct disadvantage. However Christians are particularly at risk especially when they are falsely accused of pro-Western sympathies at a time of intense anti-US sentiment. Conversion from Islam is treated very severely. Sensational and exaggerated reports about mass conversions from Islam (including by Christian leaders overseas) have resulted in arrests among the Christian communities and attacks on churches.
Iraq	Continuing attacks against Christians have prompted successive waves of emigration. According to UN reports in 2010, of the 1.6 million Iraqi refugees abroad, up to 40 percent were thought to be Christians. Between 2003 and 2010 more than 2,000 Christians are thought to have been killed by violence, many targeted primarily because of their faith.
Israel and Palestine	Many Christians have left, not because of anti-Christian persecution but because of the pressures of life under Israeli occupation. However Christians also face difficulties in areas under the Palestinian authorities, both in the West Bank but more especially in the Gaza Strip. Since Hamas took over Gaza in June 2007, Christians have come under pressure from Islamists to conform to Muslim practices. Christians have been warned against any public display of Christianity. In 2007 a Christian bookstore was attacked and the manager killed. Messianic Believers (Jewish Christians) are persecuted in Israel (by threat to property rather than life) as traitors to Judaism.
Kazakhstan	Many Christian groups find it difficult to obtain government registration which causes them serious problems and limits their activities. False accusations and negative propaganda are made against Christians. Evangelism is forbidden. There have been attacks on churches.
Kyrgyzstan	Christians are not allowed to worship in houses or public locations, but only in registered church buildings. But only three Russian Orthodox churches – no Protestant or Catholic congregations – have gained registration since the law was established in 2009. Evangelistic literature, including Bibles, is not allowed to be distributed in the country
Laos	The constitution guarantees religious freedom, but a decree by the prime minister in 2002 requires official approval for most religious activities, including evangelism, printing, building places of worship, and contacts with foreign religious groups. Christians can be arrested and held without trial because they are seen as connected to the West.
Lebanon	The constitution provides freedom of religion and this freedom includes the right of Christian groups to organise schools, associations and courts. However the country is becoming increasingly Islamic and Christians are emigrating (although partly for economic reasons. Also Gallup records that slightly more Muslims want to leave than Christians). Less than 50% of the population is now Christian. In July 2010 Ahmad Hariri, secretary general of Sunni political party the Future Movement, which is part of the ruling coalition,

	urged Muslims in Lebanon to “nurture the Christian presence” in the region, saying it was an “Arab and Islamic responsibility as much as it is a Christian one”.
Lybia	Converts to Christianity can be imprisoned. Evangelism is illegal.
Maldives	There is increasing intolerance towards non-Muslims. In 2010, Open Doors, a Protestant human rights organisation, released a report listing Maldives as the fifth-worst country for persecution of Christians. The constitution bans all religious practices other than Islam. Non-Muslim foreigners are only allowed to pray in private and must not evangelise. They may have their luggage searched for “un-Islamic” books, CDs, images, and other religious items. In November 2009 the parliament approved the primary stages of a bill banning all non-Muslim places of worship.
Mauritania	Conversion to Christianity can lead to the death penalty. Evangelism and the distribution of Christian literature are illegal.
Morocco	Christians may practise their faith openly but evangelism is illegal.
Nepal	Evangelism is illegal.
Nigeria	The constitution guarantees religious freedom and forbids the adoption of a state religion. However, <i>Shari’a</i> law is applied in 12 of Nigeria’s 36 states. Criminals can suffer flogging, amputation of limbs, and even the death sentence. In principle this does not apply to Christians but Christians report widespread discrimination, including false charges of blasphemy against Islam; Christian students and teachers being forced to leave schools; permits to build churches are refused. Over 300 churches have been destroyed in the last four years. Teenagers are abducted and forced to convert to Islam. The extremist Islamist group Boko Haram is a threat to Christians. It is seeking to impose <i>Shari’a</i> law, and outlaw “western education”. Christians and Muslims have been killed in inter-religious violence. However Gallup found that 60% of Nigerians reject Boko Haram’s “anti-western rhetoric.” Also in the Jos Central plateau area both Christian and Muslim militias have attacked each other and destroyed mosques and churches.
North Korea	North Korea is probably the most difficult place in the world to be a Christian. The constitution provides for “freedom of religious belief”, but in practice religious freedom does not exist. Since the communist regime began in 1953, 300,000 Christians have disappeared. People caught praying – especially if involved with foreign organisations – are likely to be executed. Prisoners are being subjected to torture, murder, rape, medical experimentation, forced labour and forced abortion. Religious detainees receive harsher treatment. Possessing a Bible is a crime that can carry the death penalty.
Pakistan	The Islamic Republic of Pakistan is officially a secular country although blaspheming the name of the Islamic prophet Muhammad or desecrating the Quran is punishable by the death penalty or life imprisonment. False accusations of blasphemy against Islam and offences against the Quran have led to killings by mobs. Sometimes these accusations stem from personal vendettas. In 2010. Archbishop Lawrence Saldanhana, President of the country’s Catholic Bishops’ Conference, said: “We are experiencing a Talibanisation of Islam. It is not so much that they are becoming more religious, rather that they are becoming more intolerant of others.” Another bishop said: “We [Christians] always experienced some form of discrimination but what we are seeing now is far more serious. We are living in a state of constant tension. In March 2010 six people were killed in an attack on the office of Christian charity World Vision in the Mansehra district. The charity said it would suspend all operations in the country
Philippines	There have been bomb attacks on various churches by Muslims.
Russia	Despite many improvements since the fall of the Soviet Union there continue to be areas of concern. Legal regulations for religious organisations have become increasingly stringent. However, despite increased regulation, courts have upheld the constitutional rights of Christian communities.
Saudi Arabia	Saudi Arabia does not allow Christians to practise their faith publicly. Although the government allows non-Muslims to practise their faith privately, security forces continue to raid private religious gatherings and confiscate religious articles. Christians have been arrested. On March 12 2012 Sheikh Abdul Aziz bin Abdullah, the Grand Mufti of Saudi Arabia, declared that it is “necessary to destroy all the churches of the region [i.e. the Middle East].”
Sri Lanka	From 2008 the rise of Sinhalese Buddhist nationalism has caused religious tensions between Buddhists and various religious minorities, including Christians. Christians were accused of converting Buddhists by unethical means and supporting terrorism, which led to violence and discrimination at a local level. In August 2009 The National Christian Evangelical Alliance of Sri Lanka reported that attacks on Christians increased drastically following the government troop’s defeat of Tamil separatists in May. There have been violent attacks on churches and other Christian organisations and on individual Christians.
Sudan	Some 2.5 million people died in the 1983-2005 civil war. The country split into two

	countries – mainly Muslim Sudan and mainly Christian South Sudan - in July 2011 after the people of the south voted for independence. Christians had suffered terrible atrocities before the division, with attacks on churches, and even crucifixions by the rebel Lord's Resistance Army (LRA). Christians had been labelled 'cockroaches.' 700,000 Christians of southern origin still remaining in Sudan fear retribution.
Tajikistan	Christian converts suffer harassment, beatings and arrest. Churches find it difficult to gain registration.
Tunisia	Christians are discriminated against and evangelism is illegal.
Turkey	There have been growing concerns about the rise of extremism in Turkey, including religiously motivated attacks and threats. In 2010 a senior catholic bishop was assassinated and evidence emerged of links with Islamists. The government has not given recognition to various religious communities, despite requests. Missionary activity is opposed.
Turkmenistan	The constitution allows freedom of religion but in practice the government harasses religious minorities and restricts freedom of worship. Churches must be registered and registration is difficult to obtain. Even registered churches have been restricted. Religious literature is censored.
United Arab Emirates	The UAE is among the most tolerant countries in the Gulf and its constitution allows religious freedom but in practice this only applies to expatriates. Conversion is illegal, as is evangelism and the circulation of non-Islamic literature.
Venezuela	The situation is worsening with President Chavez considering plans to confiscate churches, schools and other religious buildings. There have been attacks on Christians.
Vietnam	There have been improvements in religious freedom recently. However, some Christian groups reported government harassment and excessive use of force. A number of churches claimed government forces had either sanctioned or actually taken part in violence against them. Some Protestant groups reported undue delays in obtaining government registration. In January 2009 the Prime Minister declared that none of the 2,250 properties seized from the Vietnamese Church (before 1st July 1991) would be returned.
Yemen	Islam is the state religion and Sharia law is the foundation of the legal system. Christians are able to worship with relative freedom in the few places of worship designated to them. The growing influence of Al Qaeda is a problem. It has called on Muslims in the Arabian Peninsula to wage <i>jihad</i> (holy war) against Christians and Jews in the area. In 2009 several expatriate Christians were murdered because of missionary activities.

Are Christians in Britain being persecuted?

Some even prominent Christians are using the word persecution of the way Christians are being treated in Britain. I have written a paper about it which may be found at

<http://www.christianteaching.org.uk/DiscriminationAgainstBritishChristians.pdf>

In that paper I concluded:

- That recent high profile cases of Christians being penalised for wearing Christian symbols (including in hospitals where people of other faiths are allowed to do the equivalent), for sensitively praying (as a health professional) with or sharing their faith with patients, for refusing (even as professionals) certain involvement with homosexuals should not have happened.
- That the new legislation on equality needs to be reassessed so that religious freedom is not undermined.
- That both judges and employers sadly have accepted the propaganda that Britain is no longer a Christian country in terms of public opinion.
- That some people in the pro-gay lobby are using the gay issue not just to seek respect and equality for homosexuals but to use the issue as a Trojan horse to marginalize orthodox Christians and the church. It is proving very effective.
- That Christianity is being marginalised in judicial proceedings, employment, as well as in parts of the media.

Finally, I wrote: "Are British Christians being "persecuted"? Well no, not yet. But some are being discriminated

against and oppressed, including by well-meaning but misled people, and the future is likely to be even more difficult for them.”

I have to add that, in the light of the severe persecution of Christians in many countries of the world, I find it rather difficult when Christians use the word ‘persecution’ of the relatively slight difficulties we Christians face in this country.

In conclusion, it seems clear to me that persecution of Christians has grown very significantly over the last century. One could argue that it could subside again but I do not find that convincing. So, although we none of us know how much more extensive persecution could become this ‘sign’ seems well on the way towards fulfilment.

Turning away from the faith (Mt 24:10)

Jesus said that another sign of the end was people turning away from the faith: “At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold” (Matthew 24:10, 12). Jesus had in mind people who had faith but who have now turned away from it, either because of persecution or because of the “increase of wickedness.” There are, of course, many in ‘Christian countries,’ some of whom had a Christian background, who have turned away from it, although some may never have had a personal faith. As we shall see, the current “turning away from the faith” is in countries where there is little or no persecution. It is a matter of debate as to whether there is an increase of wickedness in these countries (compared with countries where Christianity is strong and growing) as there is evidence on both sides.

To listen to some people, including Christians, there is currently a massive decline in Christianity with people turning away from the faith.

One secular source, Hub Pages, has a section on *The Decline and Fall of Christianity* which it describes as a series of articles which “will explore the various elements of Christianity's decline into irrelevance on the global scale.” It has articles on the decline of Christianity in America and the West. In America belief in God has declined from 92-98% in World War II to 80% in 2010 (with 12% believing in a ‘universal spirit’). People describing themselves as Christians fell from 92% in 1948 to 78% in 2008. The majority of Americans do not now attend church weekly. In 1958 some 75% of Americans claimed religion was very important to them whereas in 2008 the number was just over half. Even so, Christianity is still a major influence in the USA.

Hub Pages reports that only 38% of people in developed nations say religion is important to them. In 2007-8 eight of the eleven least religious countries in the world were in Europe. Belief in God in Britain declined from 79% in the 1960s to 68% in the 1990s. About a third of French people don’t believe in God.

Hub Pages goes on to speak of the causes of the decline:

- Cultural factors – secularisation in sexual matters, abortion, gay relationships and gay marriage and divorce; a subjective consumer approach to religion.
- Political secularisation: they instance the failed attempts to have references to God and Christianity in the 2004 EU Constitutional Treaty and the 2007 Lisbon Treaty.
- Scientific and intellectual factors (but these comments are only relevant to fundamentalists).

It is true that people who called themselves Christians in Europe (some being nominal and not involved in the church) declined from 94.5% of the population to 80.2% between 1910 and 2010. Now, according to the 2005 Eurobarometer Poll, 52% of Europeans believe in God and 27% believe in some sort of spirit or life force, whilst 19% don’t believe in either and 3% don’t know. But what people like those writing the Hub Pages ignore is that there has been, and still is, remarkable growth in Christianity in Africa, Asia and Latin America.

The December 2011 Pew Forum report *Global Christianity: A Report on the Size and Distribution of the World’s Christian Population* shows this. It states:

The number of Christians around the world has more than tripled in the last 100 years, from about 600 million in 1910 to more than 2 billion in 2010. But the world’s overall population also has risen rapidly, from an estimated 1.8 billion in 1910 to 6.9 billion in 2010. As a result, Christians make up about the same portion of the world’s population today (32%) as they did a century ago (35%).

This apparent stability, however, masks a momentous shift. Although Europe and the Americas still are home to a

majority of the world's Christians (63%), that share is much lower than it was in 1910 (93%). And the proportion of Europeans and Americans who are Christian has dropped from 95% in 1910 to 76% in 2010 in Europe as a whole, and from 96% to 86% in the Americas as a whole. [Again many of these will be nominal Christians].

At the same time, Christianity has grown enormously in sub-Saharan Africa and the Asia-Pacific region, where there were relatively few Christians at the beginning of the 20th century. The share of the population that is Christian in sub-Saharan Africa climbed from 9% in 1910 to 63% in 2010, while in the Asia-Pacific region it rose from 3% to 7%. Christianity today – unlike a century ago – is truly a global faith.

It goes on to point out that only 26% of Christians now live in Europe (compared with 66% in 1910) and 37% in the Americas. 24% live in Sub-Saharan Africa and 13% in Asia and the Pacific. Christians are less than a third of the world's population but are the majority in 158 countries (some two-thirds of the world).

In the UK Peter Brierley records that in 2005 there were 5.8 million churchmembers (12.3% of the population). But in 2010 that number was 5.5 million (11.2% of the population). At that rate by 2015 there will be 5.2 million (10.3% of the population). However, there has been church growth in certain places. Between 2005 and 2010 2,500 new congregations have started (but 1,400 churches have closed). Brierley calculates that between 2005 and 2010 the number of Fresh Expressions (new informal congregations started by mainstream denominations) will rise by 55,000 and the Pentecostal Redeemed Church of God by 74,000. (The Orthodox Church is growing but much of that is due to immigration). There are 500,000 people in black majority churches – 60 years ago there were hardly any.

Sadly there has been serious decline in Christianity in the Middle East largely through people emigrating as a result of pressures and persecution. Prof Habib Malik points out that in 1948 Jerusalem was 20% Christian but now is 2% Christian. For centuries Bethlehem was 80% Christian but now 33%. Lebanon was majority Christian, but now 33%. Syria at independence was nearly 50% Christian but now 4%. In the mid 20th century Jordan was 18% Christian but is now 2%. Sixty years ago the Palestinian Areas were 10% Christian but now 2%. Also before the war in 2003 Iraq had between 800,000 and 1.4 million Christians, i.e. 5% of the population but now the figure is only 500,000-600,000. Cardinal Christoph Schönborn of Vienna warned in June 2012: “Religious geography is mobile. And as things go, it may happen that the Near East will undergo the fate of the North African Christianity in the seventh century.”

These statistics do not support the idea that we are currently seeing many turning away from the faith and betraying and hating each other, although there is certainly a massive turning away from the faith in Western countries, particularly Europe. That does illustrate that such decline can happen quite quickly and dramatically though, and could do so again in the future. One of the main causes seems to be materialism.

However, it has to be said that one of the reasons people are leaving the church is the failure of the church itself. It is not only the failure of very many churches to evangelize and to provide ministry and fellowship of biblical standards but it is the failure of sections of the church to live up to biblical standards of behaviour. There is all too much nominal faith, hypocrisy and ungodly behaviour. Failings amongst clergy, some of it very serious, have done enormous damage. A British 2011 Ipsos MORI poll for the British Medical Association showed clergy coming 6th after doctors, teachers, professors, judges and scientists in terms of trustworthiness in telling the truth. In 1983 clergy came top of the list, beating even doctors by 3%. Then clergy were trusted by 85% of the population. Now the figure is 68%.

False prophets and messiahs (Mt 24:11, 24)

In his list of signs of his return Jesus twice mentions false messiahs. In Matthew 24:4-5 he warns: “Watch out that no one deceives you. For many will come in my name, claiming, “I am the Messiah,” and will deceive many.” This is in a context where he says: “the end is still to come All these are the beginning of birth-pains” (vv. 6, 8). Then later on he says: “False messiahs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect” (v. 24). However this is in the context of great end time distress: “If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened. At that time if anyone says to you, “Look, here is the Messiah!” or, “There he is!” do not believe it” (vv. 22-23).

It would appear therefore that Jesus says false messiahs will happen from time to time throughout history and they are reminders that he, the true Messiah, is coming back, but the matter will become more serious in the end times. False messiahs will have more influence and be more deceptive.

There have certainly been false messiahs over the centuries. So far I have discovered 81 people who in one way or

another have made significant messianic claims:⁴⁵

Century	Number of 'messiahs'
1st	2
2 nd	2
5 th	1
7 th	1
8 th	2
12 th	2
13 th	1
15 th	2
16 th	3
17 th	5
18 th	4
19 th	10
20 th	39
21 st (up to 2012)	7
TOTAL:	81

There may have been more and the increase in numbers may partly be explained by modern communications – we hear of more such people. However modern communications may also facilitate false messiahs gaining followers, as we can see in various modern messianic cults. We can hardly say that we are in the great end time distress which, if not cut short, would mean “no one would survive.” It is interesting, though, to see the increase in numbers, which could be significant. It must also be remembered that it is not so much the numbers which are significant as the power of the claimant to attract followers and also the ability to use modern communications. Now that any individual, without necessarily large financial means, can communicate potentially to a worldwide audience, one could easily imagine a charismatic personality attracting a huge following.

Worldwide evangelism (Mt 24:14)

Jesus foretold: “This gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.” Now that the world is a global village and global communication is abundant, it is easy to think that the whole world must have been reached with the Gospel.

At the Global Consultation on World Evangelization in Singapore in 1989 the AD 2000 Movement was set up to complete the task of world evangelization by 31st December 2000. Its watchword was “A church for every people and the gospel for every person by the year 2000.”

Two years earlier Pope John Paul II proclaimed 1990-2000 the “Universal decade of evangelization, in order to put the Good News of salvation in the hands of every person before the dawn of the Third Millennium.”

At the end of the 19th century Arthur T. Pierson, editor of *Missionary Review of the World* had spoken in similar terms but he added that fulfilling Matthew 24:14 involves not only initial evangelism but setting up churches, schools, printing presses, medical missions and the like. This raises the whole question of what nowadays would be required to fulfil Jesus’ prophecy. Evangelising every individual could never be finally completed because new children would constantly be growing up, so some have said fulfilling the Great Commission involves creating a viable, believing community in every group in the world.

The least evangelized peoples of the world live in 6 countries within “the 10/40 window” i.e. between 10-40 degrees latitude in the Northern hemisphere. In 2000 Luis Bush, International Director for the AD2000 Movement wrote that there were some 1,100 groups in the world still lacking believing fellowships of 100 members but that 500 groups had been reached in the previous decade. He said that only 265 groups had no mission initiative amongst them. However he added that there were some 7,400 smaller groups with less than 10,000 population which did not have a viable indigenous church.⁴⁶

On the other hand David Barrett actually increased his estimate of the world's unevangelized population from 18% in 1998 to 25% in 2000.⁴⁷ Then he and others say that, as of mid-2010, 2,026,696,000 people, or 29.3% of Earth’s population are unevangelised. They call this World A: The unevangelized world. (World B: The evangelized non-

Christian world contains 2,587,410,000 people, or 37.5% of the world's population. World C: The Christian world contains 2,292,454,000 people or 33.2% of the world's population.⁴⁸ Christians are found in all 238 countries and in at least 11,500 of Earth's 12,600 ethnic language groups.⁴⁹

The global birth rate is 372,000 births per day. There are 153,000 deaths daily. Barrett and his colleagues say that there are 170,000 new Christian converts per day (62 million baptisms a year) but add that there are 91,000 'defectors' per day (deaths as well as those abandoning the church). This results in church growth of 79,000 a day, 29 million per annum. They further break down the figures to record that through evangelism 12,500,000 people a day are 're-evangelized' (i.e. they have previously been evangelized) and 166,000 persons a day are being evangelized for the first time. However this leaves 1,871 million unevangelized persons – a number which is expanding at 53,000 a day.⁵⁰ Although the percentage of unevangelized people is decreasing the actual number of unevangelized people is rising because of population growth.

Barrett and his colleagues also say that everywhere on Earth can now easily be targeted with effective evangelism and that 690 million Christians are involved in it (1,540 million Christians are not). However they go on to point out that only 3.1% of missionaries go to World A – the non-Christian world whereas 25.2% go to World B – the evangelized world and 71.6% go to World C – the Christian world.⁵¹

Signs that may point to the imminence of Jesus' return

- *Cosmic disturbances (Mt 24:29)*
- *The Jewish people regaining control of Jerusalem (Lk 21:24).*
- *The rebellion and deceptive 'signs and wonders' of the man of lawlessness (Antichrist) who proclaims himself to be God (2 Thess 2:1-12)*
- *The sudden financial collapse of the world system ('Babylon') (Rev 18)*

Cosmic disturbances (Mt 24:29)

Jesus foretells: "Immediately after the distress of those days 'the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.'" There is similar language in Revelation 8:7-12:

⁷ The first angel sounded his trumpet, and there came hail and fire mixed with blood, and it was hurled down on the earth. A third of the earth was burned up, a third of the trees were burned up, and all the green grass was burned up.

⁸ The second angel sounded his trumpet, and something like a huge mountain, all ablaze, was thrown into the sea. A third of the sea turned into blood, ⁹ a third of the living creatures in the sea died, and a third of the ships were destroyed.

¹⁰ The third angel sounded his trumpet, and a great star, blazing like a torch, fell from the sky on a third of the rivers and on the springs of water – ¹¹ the name of the star is Wormwood. A third of the waters turned bitter, and many people died from the waters that had become bitter.

¹² The fourth angel sounded his trumpet, and a third of the sun was struck, a third of the moon, and a third of the stars, so that a third of them turned dark. A third of the day was without light, and also a third of the night.

Clearly there is a good deal of apocalyptic symbolism here. It cannot really be said that there are any unusual cosmic disturbances at the present time. For as long as we have had records there have been comets and supernovae (star explosions forming temporary very bright objects in the sky). But I can never read these passages without remembering that one of the main interests of modern astronomers is Near Earth Objects (NEOs). These are asteroids (which are rocks) and comets (which are small, frozen masses of dust and gas) orbiting the Sun. Many of them are smaller than a football field but the largest known is some 600miles across. NASA⁵² predicts that over a thousand smaller asteroids or comets will hit the earth in the next 500 years. In 1908 an asteroid probably 100-150 feet across knocked down and partially burned 1500 square miles of forest in the Tunguska region of Siberia. However they point out that most such small objects simply break up in the upper atmosphere and do little surface damage.

NASA also predicts that many larger objects, up to half a mile across will hit the earth in the next 1000 to 10 million years and they can kill millions of people. They add: "These impacts could produce damaging blast waves, earthquakes, fires, and tidal waves, but the area affected will be less than the size of the U.S."⁵³

Much more rarely mountain-sized comets and asteroids (some 6 miles across) will hit Earth. NASA says that when such an object hits the surface "it creates an enormous ejecta cloud which explodes outward into space, and re-enters the atmosphere as countless shooting stars. The sky would be converted from its normal transparent blue to a brilliant

red sheet of glowing lava. The red sky would cool over the next hour or so, leaving the world in total darkness as the shooting star remnants blot out the sun, and vast billows of smoke fill the sky from the continental scale fires ignited by the glowing lava-filled sky. Smoke from fires, dust from pulverized ejecta, and sulfate from within the objects would cause so much light loss that photosynthesis would cease for several months, a likely mechanism for causing extinctions in the ocean. Land surface temperatures would also plummet.”⁵⁴ This may have been what wiped out the dinosaurs.

Astronomers are now constantly looking for NEO’s and especially for what NASA describes as Potentially Hazardous Asteroids (PHAs) which have the potential to make threatening close approaches to the Earth.⁵⁵ NASA continues:

“Great care must then be taken to verify any Earth collision predictions that are made. Given the extremely unlikely nature of such a collision, almost all of these predictions will turn out to be false alarms. However, if an object is verified to be on an Earth colliding trajectory, it seems likely that this collision possibility will be known several years prior to the actual event. Given several years warning time, existing technology could be used to deflect the threatening object away from Earth.....

“No one should be overly concerned about an Earth impact of an asteroid or comet. The threat to any one person from auto accidents, disease, other natural disasters and a variety of other problems is much higher than the threat from NEOs. Over long periods of time, however, the chances of the Earth being impacted are not negligible so that some form of NEO insurance is warranted. At the moment, our best insurance rests with the NEO scientists and their efforts to first find these objects and then track their motions into the future. We need to first find them, then keep an eye on them.”⁵⁶

It does not seem feasible at present to speak of any significant cosmic disturbances which could be seen as a sign of the End. However Jesus’ prediction seems very feasible, even on a purely scientific basis and his language and that of the Book of Revelation seem remarkably appropriate to some NEO strike.

The Jewish people regaining control of Jerusalem (Lk 21:24).

I have given a great deal of critical thought to this subject over the years and have concluded that, given the prophecies in the Old Testament and the ‘hints’ in the New Testament, the remarkable modern return of the Jewish people to Israel and their re-establishment of the State of Israel is of significance for the End Times. This is not because I give uncritical support to the modern State of Israel – far from it. At the time of writing I am very critical of various policies of the Israeli government towards the Palestinians, and of other aspects such as the inconsistent attitude towards the West Bank settlements. In particular I am critical of Israel’s lack of seriousness about the peace process.

The Prophets thundered about justice, including for the non-Israelite and they warned that for the Jewish people to retain the Land was dependent on obedience to God. I do not see Israel as being obedient to God.

However, I am aware of the terrible history of anti-Semitism – especially on the part of the Christian church. I am also aware that, sadly, anti-Semitism is alive and well in the modern world. For example, there are people, including Christians, who wish to boycott Israeli goods which come from the Occupied Territories (or even from Israel proper) – a view for which I have some sympathy – but these people are not also boycotting goods, say, from Saudi Arabia and other oppressive regimes. I see this unbalanced attitude as crypto- or perhaps unconscious anti-Semitism.

I am also very aware of the enduring trauma of the Holocaust in the Jewish and Israeli mind. I therefore understand their fears about losing their relatively safe homeland, even if they are so powerfully militarily.

Having lived and worked in Israel for some years, I am well aware that Israel is a secular democracy and most Israelis are no more religious than the British. More serious, modern Israel on the whole rejects its Messiah, although I rejoice in the growth of the Messianic Movement (‘Jewish Christians’). It is impossible to obtain reliable figures for the Messianic Movement: estimates vary from 15,000 in 120 congregations in Israel to 8,000 in 50 congregations! (Estimates of Messianic Believers – Jewish Christians - in the USA vary from 175,000 to 40,000). But one thing is clear, the movement is experiencing remarkable growth, including in Israel. Some see this as the beginnings of the fulfilment of Romans 11: 25-26 “Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in, and in this way all Israel will be saved.”

I do see the return of the Jewish people to Israel as a sign of the End. I am not going to write more on the subject here because I have written fully elsewhere. See <http://www.prayerforpeace.org.uk/christianzionismbibebias.html>. You may also find the following helpful:

<http://www.prayerforpeace.org.uk/christianzionismrightwrong.html>;

<http://www.prayerforpeace.org.uk/theologicalposition.html>;

<http://www.prayerforpeace.org.uk/historyofdispensationalism.html> (which shows I am not a dispensationalist).

The coming of the Antichrist

Paul writes to the Thessalonians that one of the later signs of the day of the Lord is that “the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction. He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshipped, so that he sets himself up in God’s temple, proclaiming himself to be God.” (2 Thess 2:3-4). This man will “use all sorts of displays of power through signs and wonders that serve the lie.” (2 Thess 2:9).

Paul is predicting the ultimate rebellion against God, which focuses on a very powerful, Satanically-inspired leader. He will not appear to be evil to many people in the world but he will be, in fact, an evil parody of the Messiah, the Anti-Christ, seeking to make out that he is the true Messiah. Paul reassures the Thessalonians, though, that only those who have “refused to love the truth and so be saved” (v 11) will be deceived by him.

This passage should be paralleled with similar prophecies in Daniel 7:8ff where the boastful little “horn” (person in power) “was waging war against the holy people and defeating them” (v. 21) for “a time, times and half a time” (three and a half years, i.e. a limited period of time) just before the son of man came with the clouds of heaven to rule the earth (v. 13-14).

Then there is 1 John 2:18, 22 which says that the Antichrist is coming and he will deny that Jesus is the Christ.

Another parallel is in Revelation 13 which like Daniel 7:7 refers to the “Beast” which had ten horns.⁵⁷ This beast was boastful and had waged war against God’s holy people for 42 months (three and a half years, i.e. a limited period of time).

Prof. Robert Mounce comments: “There is little doubt that for John the beast was the Roman Empire as persecutor of the church. It was that spirit of imperial power which claimed a religious sanction for its gross injustices. Yet the beast is more than the Roman Empire. John’s Vision grew out of the details of his own historical situation, but its complete fulfillment awaits the final denouement of human history. The beast has always been, and will be in a final intensified manifestation, the deification of secular authority.”⁵⁸

Prof, G B Caird wrote: “All political power is the gift of God; but when men deify the state, either directly by a religious cult or indirectly by demanding for it the total loyalty and obedience that are due to God alone, it ceases to be human and becomes bestial when men worship the state, according to it the absolute loyalty and obedience that are due not to Caesar but to God, the state goes over to the Enemy. What Satan calls from the abyss is not government, but that abuse of government, the omniscient state. It is thus misleading to say that the monster *is* Rome ... because Rome is only its latest embodiment.”⁵⁹

Writing of Revelation, Caird adds: “John does not actually use the title Antichrist for the monster, though he might well have done.”⁶⁰

Rev 13:8 states that “All inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast—all whose names have not been written in the Lamb’s book of life.” Mounce comments: “The worship of a satanically inspired perversion of secular authority is the ultimate offense against the one true God.”⁶¹

There is a second beast in Revelation 13:11 and Mounce comments: “The role of the second beast is to bring men to worship the first beast. To achieve this end he is empowered to work miracles. By economic boycott and the threat of death he intends to make all men worship the Image of the beast. This priestly role identifies the second beast as a religious power. In John’s day the reference would be either to the local priests of the imperial cult or to the provincial council responsible for enforcing emperor worship throughout Asia. In the final days of Antichrist the false prophet stands for the role of false religion in effecting the manipulation of mankind to the worship of secular power. It is the universal victory of humanism.”⁶²

But Michael Wilcock writes: “Religion, indeed, is too narrow an identification of the second beast. He is, in modern parlance, the ideology—whether religious, philosophical, or political—which ‘gives breath to’ any human social structure organized independently of God.”⁶³

From the text of Scripture and the comments of these scholars it is clear therefore that the Bible foretells that just before the return of Christ, Antichrist will emerge. He will be rebellious and boastful, but I suspect that will not be overt. Rather he will seek to display characteristics which parody the true Messiah and deceive those who do not have faith in Christ. He will have remarkable abilities and will welcome adulation or worship of himself. This will be linked with worship of the omniscient state and the encouragement of absolute loyalty and obedience – a deification of secular authority.

How are we to discern events leading towards this sign of the End Times?

Here again, the subject has been brought into disrepute. For example, rumours have circulated that Barack Obama may be the Antichrist! The rationale is: “The anti-Christ will be a man, in his 40s, of Muslim descent, who will deceive the nations with persuasive language, and have a massive Christ-like appeal.... the prophecy says that people will flock to him and he will promise false hope and world peace, and when he is in power, will destroy everything.” (Quite where in Scripture the age and the Muslim descent come from, is not clear!).

Another rumour is that Bill Gates is the Antichrist. The rationale here is: If you take all the letters in Bill Gates III and then convert it in ASCII code (American Standard “Code for Information and Interchange) and then add up all the numbers you will get 666 which is the number of the beast It was already foretold in the Bible that someone powerful would rise up and lead the world to destruction. Bill Gates definitely has that kind of power in his hands. More than 80% of the world's computers run on Windows and Dos (including those at Pentagon!) If all his products have some kind of small program that can give him control, setting off nuclear arsenals, creating havoc in security systems, financial systems all over the world, etc...”

Other candidates for Antichrist have been:

Ronald (Wilson) Reagan (“He has six letters in each name, survived a mortal wound - although not to the head. His First Lady wore a lot of red and he moved to a house at 666 St. Cloud Rd., upon retirement.”)

Mikhail Gorbachev (“He was a charismatic leader with worldwide popularity. He ruled an enormous empire and had a weird thing on his head”).

These suggestions are quite entertaining but totally ridiculous. However there is one point to remember. St John writes: “You have heard that the antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come. This is how we know it is the last hour. They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us; but their going showed that none of them belonged to us.” (1 John 2:18-19).

So John is saying that the spirit of Antichrist is around already and there have been preliminary manifestations of it. He is referring to apostates. We could also include people like Adolf Hitler and similar charismatic evil dictators. They are not *the* (ultimate) Antichrist, but they manifest the antichrist spirit. This is in harmony with other biblical prophecies which have multiple fulfilments and then one ultimate fulfilment.

How are we sensibly and realistically to assess what, if any, indications there are today which are relevant to this very late sign of the end times? There are two main such indications:

Modern movement towards globalization

It seems clear that the Antichrist is a worldwide ruler and this is made explicit in the passage about the “Beast” in Rev 13:7-8: “It was given power to wage war against God’s holy people and to conquer them. And it was given authority over every tribe, people, language and nation. All inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast.”

It is the same in the passage about the second Beast in Revelation 13:11-14, 16-17: “Then I saw a second beast, coming out of the earth. It made the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast..... it deceived the inhabitants of the earth. It also forced all people, great and small, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on their right hands or on their foreheads, so that they could not buy or sell unless they had the mark, which is the name of the beast or the number of its name.”

So we are to expect a charismatic leader who has authority over the whole world is supported by a religious or financial adviser who unites it in worship of himself. In the last few decades especially, we have seen the world

become a global village with an increasing number of global organisations and a gradually growing opinion that we need world government.

There are, of course, great benefits in globalization and there would be great benefits in world government. I am not one of those who subscribes to a narrow nationalism, as do some of our right of centre politicians. But I do believe that there are also great dangers in world government. There will be many people who believe that, basically, all would go well given world government but they need to realize that their belief is based on human nature being basically good, which requires rather more proof than history affords. For myself, I prefer to rely on biblical prophecy which says that ultimately world government will basically go wrong, very seriously wrong. The fact that we are moving steadily and inevitably towards it is therefore a matter of concern.

So let us examine how true it is that the current world situation is moving towards being a setting where the fulfillment of the antichrist prophecies can be facilitated.

Trends towards world government

As in the case of the Antichrist, there is a great deal of paranoid, and sometimes ridiculous, writing about world government. We need to see both the benefits and the dangers of world government.

Globalisation is more than economic co-operation and international business. It includes shared transport, communication, technology, culture, sport, etc. It is “all those processes by which the peoples of the world are incorporated into a single world society.”⁶⁴

Economic globalisation includes international trade, co-ordination of finance and migration of workers. It involves loosening or removal of regulations.

There is a long historical background to modern economic globalisation. The Roman Empire covered most of the then known world, except the far east. International trade operated in the ancient world. Trade routes such as the Silk Road connected Africa, Asia and Europe centuries ago. However globalisation on a large scale began in the 19th century. Britain became the first global economic superpower and other countries followed suit with colonisation. (This sort of globalisation was based upon military invasion). Steamships and rail travel facilitated international trade.

After the Second World War globalisation grew much more rapidly and accelerated even further during the period from the fall of the USSR. Obviously air travel facilitated this, followed by the growth of information technology: the internet (with 2.3 billion users in 2012) and the World Wide Web have facilitated this. We now really do live in a global village.

The idea of world government is also not new. Various ancient empires including Rome aimed at global control. In 1304 Dante wrote that war could be eliminated if “the whole earth and all that humans can possess be a monarchy, that is, one government under one ruler. Because he possesses everything, the ruler would not desire to possess anything further, and thus, he would hold kings contentedly within the borders of their kingdoms, and keep peace among them.”⁶⁵

The ideas behind world government were evident in the 19th century. Tennyson’s famous poem Locksley Hall, written in 1842, included the words:

For I dipt into the future, far as human eye could see
Saw a Vision of the world, and all the wonder that would be ...
Till the war-drum throb'd no longer
and the battle-flags were furled
In the Parliament of man, the Federation of the world.
There the common sense of most shall hold
a fretful realm in awe
And the kindly earth shall slumber
lapt in universal law.

International organisations began in earnest in the mid 19th century. The International Peace Congress began in 1843, followed by the International Red Cross (1863), the Telegraphic Union (1865) and the Universal Postal Union (1874), the Institute of International Law (1873) and the Inter-Parliamentary Union (1886).

After the First World War, the League of Nations was set up and by 1935 had 58 members. It was replaced by the United Nations after the trauma of the Second World War. That war had seen over 60 million people killed, mostly civilians) and the first use of nuclear weapons. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted in 1948 and people like Churchill, Einstein, Ghandi and Bertrand Russell called for federal world government. For example Einstein wrote to the United Nations in October 1947:

“The United Nations is an extremely important and useful institution provided the peoples and Governments of the world realize that it is merely a transitional system toward the final goal, which is the establishment of a supranational authority vested with sufficient legislative and executive powers to keep the peace. The present impact lies in the fact that there is no sufficient, reliable supra-national authority The United Nations now and world Government eventually must serve one single goal the guarantee of the security, tranquillity, and the welfare of all mankind.”⁶⁶

The World Federalist Movement was set up in 1947 but was eventually sidelined by the Cold War. On its current website it states: “We fear that the United Nation's efforts towards peace, like those of the League of Nations, may not be successful, if the world is not willing to take this next step to World Federal Government.”⁶⁷ It continues to affirm the following principles:

- Limitation of national sovereignty, and the transfer to the world federal government of such legislative, executive and judicial powers as relate to the world affairs.
- Enforcement of world law directly on the individual whoever or wherever he may be, within the jurisdiction of the world federal government: guarantee of the rights of man and suppression of all attempts against the security of the federation.
- Creation of supranational armed forces capable of guaranteeing the security of the world federal government and of its member states. Disarmament of member nations to the level of their internal policing requirements.
- Ownership and control by the world federal government of atomic development and of other scientific discoveries capable of mass destruction.
- Power to raise adequate revenues directly and independently of state taxes.⁶⁸

The UN set up the World Health Organisation, the International Labour Organization and the International Telecommunications Union. It has also, of course, provide peacekeeping forces around the globe. The 20th century also saw the establishment of the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the World Trade Organisation and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. The eight richest nations have come together in the G8 and 20 nations have joined in the G20.

The World Bank, which provides loans to developing countries, and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) were set up in 1944. The IMF describes itself as “an organization of 188 countries, working to foster global monetary cooperation, secure financial stability, facilitate international trade, promote high employment and sustainable economic growth, and reduce poverty around the world.”⁶⁹

The General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), which led to removal of trade restrictions, was signed in 1947 and then was replaced in 1995 by the World Trade Organisation (WTO). Various Free Trade Areas have been set up.

There are now, of course, many multinational corporations and transnational companies who employ some 3 billion people.

The huge amount of cross-border movement of goods, services, technology and capital means that national economies are becoming more interdependent. This integration has led to the global market place or single world market. The involvement of China and India has provided about half of this labour force.

World trade has increased over 100 times since the 1950s (from \$95bn to \$12 trillion). Banks and investors now have trillions of dollars of assets invested overseas.

Professor Geoff Mulgan said: “[T]he starting point for understanding the world today is not the size of its GDP or the destructive power of its weapons systems, but the fact that it is so much more joined together than before. It may look like it is made up of separate and sovereign individuals, firms, nations or cities, but the deeper reality is one of multiple connections.”⁷⁰

Globalisation inevitably has an effect on the importance and freedom of nation states. Internationalisation of financial markets, technology and some manufacturing and services restrict the freedom of nation states.

National functions are to some degree replaced by international agreements and institutions such as the International Criminal Court, the World Bank, the World Trade Organisation, or the European Union and the European Central Bank.

Professor Colin Leys wrote: “It is not just that governments can no longer ‘manage’ their national economies, to survive in office they must increasingly ‘manage’ national politics in such a ways as to adapt them to the pressures of trans-national market forces.”⁷¹

The distinction between national policies and global policies is becoming less clear. Social and economic lawmaking and regulation is increasingly supranational. But many people worry that such global governance is not sufficiently democratic. So there are calls for the extension of liberal democratic institutions to the transnational level.

During the Cold War the European Community was developed and with the Maastricht Treaty of 1992 became the European Union. It now has 27 members and includes half a billion people. Ten other such unions with a combined membership of 195 nations were also formed around the world.⁷² When the Cold War ended in 1991 interest in federal world government came to the fore again. One very significant move towards world government was the establishment of the International Criminal Court in 2002 supported by 139 nations.

Since the end of the Cold War there has been a call for a UN Parliamentary Assembly which could eventually lead to a directly-elected UN Parliament.

The Independent Working Group on the Future of the United Nations stated:

“We imagine that the UN of the next century would still remain an organization of nation-states responding to its members' concerns and needs. By the mid-twenty-first century, however, it is likely that the nature of statehood and assumptions about national sovereignty will have evolved in response to global needs and to an enlarged sense of world community. The communications revolution will have created a greater awareness of the interconnectedness of all human society. Disparate peoples and cultures will have become more familiar with one another. A growing awareness that the gravest challenges are global ones will have generated an acceptance of the critical need for collective action.”⁷³

Arguments for world government

Nations are facing various global problems and it is argued they can only be effectively tackled on a global basis.

- **War and terrorism**

Worldwide terrorism is a huge threat. Many feel it is only a matter of time before terrorists obtain nuclear, chemical or biological weapons. Then there are wars and situations which could lead to war, especially in the Middle East. The pressure is on for a truly global response to these issues. *The Independent Working Group on the Future of the United Nations* (formed in 1993) proposed “A United Nations Rapid Reaction Force should be established for urgent deployment on the decisions of the Security Council.”⁷⁴

- **Economic considerations**

The Independent Working Group on the Future of the United Nations pointed out that: “There has been a growing interdependence of world economies As the global economy becomes interdependent the enhanced UN system will have begun to harmonize trade practices, technological cooperation and monetary policies of Member States and international institutions.”

So it proposed: “The establishment of an Economic Council as a principal organ of the United Nations is recommended. The Economic Council should, in consultation with the Social Council, the Security Council and the General Assembly, be empowered to formulate guidelines to integrate the work of all UN agencies; including international institutions, programs, and offices engaged in economic issues.” It would harmonise the economic policies of the major economies around the world.⁷⁵

- **Global warming**

In the March 2012 issue of *Science* 32 scientists produced an article *Navigating the Anthropocene: Improving Earth*

System Governance in which they said:

“Science assessments indicate that human activities are moving several of Earth's sub-systems outside the range of natural variability typical for the previous 500,000 years (1, 2). Human societies must now change course and steer away from critical tipping points in the Earth system that might lead to rapid and irreversible change (3). This requires fundamental reorientation and restructuring of national and international institutions toward more effective Earth system governance and planetary stewardship.”⁷⁶

Paddy Ashdown, President of UNICEF UK, wrote in *The Independent* that we need a Financial Transaction Tax (or Tobin Tax) to counteract global warming. He added: “The poorest and most vulnerable feel the effect of climate change the most. There are approximately 756 million children living in the 10 countries most vulnerable to climate change. The 2007 Stern Review noted that if climate change goes unchecked it could cause between an additional 60,000 and 250,000 child deaths in South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa alone. These will be the poorest, most vulnerable children. It is outrageous that we are just letting this happen.”⁷⁷

Commenting on this article, Gary Stix, a senior editor of *Scientific American* wrote an article *Effective World Government will be needed to stave off climate catastrophe*. In it he said: “Unfortunately, far more is needed. To be effective, a new set of institutions would have to be imbued with heavy-handed, transnational enforcement powers. How do we create new institutions with enforcement powers way beyond the current mandate of the U.N.? **Could we ensure against a malevolent dictator who might abuse the power of such organizations?**”⁷⁸ [Emphasis mine].

- **World Poverty & Inequality**

Supporters of globalisation point out that countries such as India, China, Vietnam, and Uganda which have embraced globalisation have seen remarkable reduction in poverty.

However the Trades Union Congress states:

“Globalisation can be a force for good. It has the potential to generate wealth and improve living standards. But it isn't doing that well at the moment.

The benefits from increased trade, investment, and technological innovation are not fairly distributed. The experience of the international trade union movement suggests that the reality for the majority of the world's population is that things are getting worse.

Globalisation as we know it is increasing the gap between rich and poor. This is because the policies that drive the globalisation process are largely focussed on the needs of business.”

It adds: “One aspect of globalisation is the increasing power of multinationals to disrupt collective bargaining agreements or bargaining structures.”⁷⁹

In fact, the income gap over the last 40 years between the 10 richest countries and the 10 poorest countries is getting wider. In 1960 it stood at around 30-1 in 1990 60-1 and 2000 it reached 75-1.⁸⁰

In 2011 the Roman Catholic Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace produced a report *Towards Reforming the International Financial and Monetary Systems in the Context of Global Public Authority* which, pointed out the fact that “Global economic well-being, grew during the second half of the twentieth century, to an extent and with a speed never experienced in the history of humankind.” But it added that “inequalities within and between various countries have also grown significantly” and the situation of some countries has worsened. It also stated that “modern means of communication make these great economic, social and cultural inequalities obvious to everyone, rich and poor alike, giving rise to tensions and to massive migratory movements If no solutions are found to the various forms of injustice, the negative effects that will follow on the social, political and economic level will be destined to create a climate of growing hostility and even violence, and ultimately undermine the very foundations of democratic institutions, even the ones considered most solid.”⁸¹

In January 2012 Jeffrey Sachs, economics professor at Columbia University wrote on the *Financial Times* website:

Our 21st century predicament is that these moral strictures have mostly vanished. Global capitalism has mostly shed its moral constraints. Self-interest is no longer embedded in higher values. Consumerism is the world's secular religion, more than science, humanism, or any other -ism. “Greed is good” is not only the mantra of a 1980s Hollywood moral

fable: it is the operating principle of the top tiers of world society....

Unless we regain our moral bearings our scope for collective action will be lost. The day may soon arrive when the political system implodes, markets have utterly devastated the environment, and gluttony relentlessly commands our personal choices.⁸²

The G20 has listed 11 countries which are tax havens. Dr David McNair, Economic Adviser to Christian Aid said: "The situation that exists at present has been called the ugliest chapter in global economic affairs since slavery. That is not an exaggeration. 'We estimate that developing countries lose around \$160 billion a year because of tax dodging by multinationals and other companies trading internationally. That lost tax revenue could save lives.'⁸³

James S Henry, a leading economist and Senior Advisor to the Tax Justice Network, has produced a report for the Network *The Price of Offshore Revisited*. His research indicates that in 2010 \$21 to \$32 trillion has been invested virtually tax-free in more than 80 "offshore" secrecy jurisdictions and it has been accumulated from 139 countries. This, of course, has a huge negative effect on the tax revenue income for developing nations.⁸⁴ He adds: "By our estimates, at least a third of all private financial wealth, and nearly half of all offshore wealth, is now owned by world's richest 91,000 people "just 0.001% of the world's population. The next 51 percent of all wealth is owned by the next 8.4 million, another trivial 0.14% of the world's population."⁸⁵

He goes on to point out an important implication of this:

"Increasingly, indeed, the individual members of this private elite may be assuming many of the same attributes as multinational companies, even as MNCs have been becoming more like private individuals, so far as political rights are concerned. This means that super--rich individuals are increasingly acting as citizens of multiple jurisdictions at once, even though they may be resident "nowhere" for tax purposes; that they are able to relocate quickly across borders; and that they are able to acquire "representation without taxation," the ability to exert local political influence in multiple jurisdictions, independent of whatever taxes they pay in any particular jurisdiction.

It also means that as a group this transnational elite has, in principle, a strong vested interest in pushing for weaker income and wealth taxation, weaker government regulation, more "open" markets, and weaker restrictions on political influence and campaign spending across borders " with a huge "transnational haven army" of pirate bankers, law firms, accounting firms, lobbyists, and PR firms ready to do their bidding. Thus the *objective* increase in global wealth inequality at the individual level that we have begun to measure here sets the stage for asking a wide variety of questions about the resulting political and social impacts on the traditional nation---state."⁸⁶

It is clear that one of the main arguments for world government is so that there can be control of the very powerful multi-national companies and individuals (although many argue this could be achieved without world government).

Stephen Schifferes, Professor of Financial Journalism at City University points out that:

"The speed and scale of economic change has made it increasingly difficult for governments to keep their economic destiny in their own hands. And what is most disturbing for many people is that no-one seems to be in charge, or be able to agree fair rules for the new global economic order."

He adds: "The international institutions meant to deal with the globalising world are all in trouble. For example, the World Trade Organization (WTO) is now under fire for failing to take into account labour standards or the environmental impact of trade. And its efforts to break down global trade barriers are faltering. And the IMF has found it increasingly difficult to influence the world's capital markets, whose huge financial flows dwarf its resources - or to correct the huge global imbalances that arise from trade."⁸⁷

There are other very powerful groups which also need to be controlled. For example, Aditya Chakraborty, economics leader writer, in *The Guardian* in January 2012 warned about the enormous power of the ratings agencies:

"S&P [Standard & Poor's] and its rival Moody's have a power over governments and corporations that far outranks any influence you or I as voters or workers might have." He said that they are not renowned for the competence or analysis, but they are not averse to meddling in politics and adds: "So, the agencies are neither accurate nor merely observers - yet they bully governments around the world and make billions doing so. The obvious solution would be to take this public service into public hands. Let's have a ratings agency run by the UN, funded by pooled contributions from both lenders and borrowers. It should be the only one to have preferential access to data from corporates and countries. Let's make the ratings business a utility, rather than a semi-cartel that intimidates elected politicians and rakes in excess profits. It's time to break up the bullying double-act."⁸⁸

In 1963 Pope John XXIII in his Encyclical *Pacem in Terris* observed that the world was heading towards ever greater unification. He also expressed the hope that one day “a true world political authority” would be created.

The 2011 Pontifical Council report stated:

“In the same spirit of *Pacem in Terris*, Benedict XVI himself expressed the need to create a world political authority. This seems obvious if we consider the fact that the agenda of questions to be dealt with globally is becoming ever longer. Think, for example, of peace and security; disarmament and arms control; promotion and protection of fundamental human rights; management of the economy and development policies; management of the migratory flows and food security, and protection of the environment. In all these areas, the growing interdependence between States and regions of the world becomes more and more obvious as well as the need for answers that are not just sectorial and isolated, but systematic and integrated, rich in solidarity and subsidiarity and geared to the universal common good.”

However it also warned:

“In a world on its way to rapid globalization, the reference to a world Authority becomes the only horizon compatible with the new realities of our time and the needs of humankind. However, it should not be forgotten that this development, given wounded human nature, will not come about without anguish and suffering. Through the account of the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11:1-9), the Bible warns us how the “diversity” of peoples can turn into a vehicle for selfishness and an instrument of division. In humanity there is a real risk that peoples will end up not understanding each other and that cultural diversities will lead to irremediable oppositions. The image of the Tower of Babel also warns us that we must avoid a “unity” that is only apparent, where selfishness and divisions endure because the foundations of the society are not stable. In both cases, Babel is the image of what peoples and individuals can become when they do not recognize their intrinsic transcendent dignity and brotherhood. The spirit of Babel is the antithesis of the Spirit of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-12), of God’s design for the whole of humanity: that is, unity in truth. Only a spirit of concord that rises above divisions and conflicts will allow humanity to be authentically one family and to conceive of a new world with the creation of a world public Authority at the service of the common good.”⁸⁹

Criticisms of world government

I said at the outset that even writing the title of this paper makes me feel slightly vulnerable to charges of being a nutcase! It would be even worse if I were to be associated with the anti-world government conspiracy theory constituency.

I read of one group who (*seriously*) believe that the secret elite (whoever they may be) have been programming the world population to believe in aliens in order to encourage support for world government. They even suggested that “hologram technology” could stage a space-vehicle landing on the White House lawn to back up the scare story!

They also wonder if “foul play” was involved in the Chernobyl, BP “Deepwater Horizon” and Fukushima disasters in order encourage support for world government.

It would be naive to deny the possibility of any power group manipulating in favour of global trade, finance or even political change, but I find the world government conspiracy theory paranoid and unrealistic.

There are, however, more thoughtful criticisms of world government. One is that world government is unrealistic, given the jealousies, divisions and self-seeking attitudes prevalent in the world. We have just referred to the political lobbying of the richest 91,000 people in the world. In fact, there have been reports of increasing opposition to globalisation in recent years.

Another is the big problems facing the world, global warming, poverty, war, etc., could be solved by international co-operation without moves towards world government.

A third objection is that world government could become tyrannical on the principle that “power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.” This latter objection is held by (sensible) people in a secular context but it also is in harmony with biblical prophecy.

Let us now consider this third objection in the context of recent history. The theologians I quoted at the beginning of this section, who were commenting on the biblical allusions to the Antichrist warned of the deification of the omniscient state, “a satanically inspired perversion of secular authority.” There have, of course, been examples of

political deification in history. For example, the Roman emperors were deemed to be gods. Of the modern examples, Nazi Germany is perhaps the most obvious, and the most sinister.

Lessons from the rise of Hitler

How is it that within a few years a proud civilised nation became committed ‘worshippers’ of a little lance corporal? How is it that, according to Professor Ian Kershaw, “the 12 years of Hitler’s rule permanently changed Germany, Europe, and the world.”⁹⁰

Kershaw writes elsewhere: “A regime responsible for the most destructive war in history, leaving upwards of 40 million people dead, that perpetrated, on behalf of the most modern, economically advanced, and culturally developed country on the continent of Europe, the worst genocide yet known to mankind, has an obvious claim to singularity.”⁹¹

The *New York Times* commented that Hitler was a nobody but “before the climax of a career unparalleled in history, he had subdued nine nations, defied successfully and humiliated the greatest powers of Europe, and created a social and economic system founded upon the complete subjection of scores of millions to his will in all basic features of social, political, economic and cultural life.”⁹²

Bruce Loeb, Professor of Communication & Rhetorical Studies at Idaho State University, has written about *Hitler’s Rhetorical Theory*. In that paper he quotes historians who hold that the crucial factor in Nazism’s power was Hitler’s charismatic personality and rhetoric:

Professor Robert Waite, “Hitler was Nazidom. Seldom in the history of western civilization has so much depended on one man’s personality.”

Friedrich Meinecke, Hitler “is one of the great examples of the singular and incalculable power of personality in historical life.”

William Shirer, who heard Hitler often, declares, “Hitler has a magic power to sway millions with his voice.”

Professor Trevor Roper explains, “Hitler, at the beginning, had only his voice...that was his only instrument of power. His only asset was his demagogic power over the masses, his voice.”

- **The importance of propaganda**

In *Mein Kampf* Hitler wrote a good deal about propaganda. He wrote: “I know that men are won over less by the written than by the spoken word, that every great movement on this earth owes its growth to orators and not to great writers.”⁹³ “The broad masses of a population are more amenable to the appeal of rhetoric than to any other force. All great movements are popular movements. They are the volcanic eruptions of human passions and emotions.”⁹⁴

During the First World War he came to recognise the power of British propaganda and lamented the inability of the German leadership to make use of such a powerful tool. He wrote: “I soon came to realize that the right use of propaganda was an art in itself and that this art was practically unknown to our bourgeois parties.”⁹⁵ He added: “It is nothing but a weapon, and indeed a most terrifying weapon in the hands of those who know how to use it.”⁹⁶ “More than once I was tormented by the thought that if Providence had put the conduct of German propaganda into my hands, instead of into the hands of those incompetent and even criminal ignoramuses and weaklings, the outcome of the struggle might have been different.”⁹⁷

Chapter 6 of *Mein Kampf* is entitled *War Propaganda*. In it Hitler wrote that propaganda “must always address itself to the broad masses of the people The art of propaganda consists precisely in being able to awaken the imagination of the public through an appeal to their feelings, in finding the appropriate psychological form that will arrest the attention and appeal to the hearts of the national masses”⁹⁸ The aim of propaganda is not to try to pass judgment on conflicting rights, giving each its due, but exclusively to emphasize the right which we are asserting. Propaganda must not investigate the truth objectively and, in so far as it is favourable to the other side, present it according to the theoretical rules of justice; yet it must present only that aspect of the truth which is favourable to its own side.”⁹⁹

He writes of his own experience of using propaganda with respect to the fact that the German people had believed the British “propaganda” that the Versailles Treaty was what they deserved for starting the First World War. He says: “I spoke on this theme before an assembly of two thousand persons, during which I often saw three thousand six hundred hostile eyes fixed on me. And three hours later I had in front of me a swaying mass of righteous indignation and fury. A great lie had been uprooted from the hearts and brains of a crowd composed of thousands of individuals and a truth

had been implanted in its place.”¹⁰⁰

So Hitler devoted himself to the work of propaganda, knowing that good propaganda simply repeats again and again a few main points. His main points were the difficult situation Germany was in after the First World War, the humiliation of the Versailles Treaty, the corrupt Weimar government and the Communists and Jews who ‘betrayed’ Germany in 1918 and so were “the most diabolical creatures in existence.”

He reported “It was due to the effect of our propaganda that within a short period of time hundreds of thousands of citizens became convinced in their hearts that we were right and wished us victory, although personally they were too timid to make sacrifices for our cause or even participate in it.”¹⁰¹

Ian Kershaw comments: “Unquestionably, the adulation of Hitler by millions of Germans who may otherwise have been only marginally committed to the Nazi ideology, or party, was a crucial element of political integration in the Third Reich.”¹⁰²

Trish Roberts-Miller, *Professor of Rhetoric and Writing at the University of Texas* writes: “Some people don't distinguish demagoguery from propaganda (which is generally defined as dishonest and fallacious discourse intended to further the power or agenda of the propagator), but I would say that it is a subset of propaganda: demagoguery is polarizing propaganda that functions to motivate people by rousing and justifying hatred of an outgroup. In other words, all demagoguery is propaganda, but not all propaganda is demagoguery.”¹⁰³ Hitler is clearly a demagogue as this definition indicates.

Because of their belief in the power of propaganda, the Nazis used radio broadcasts in their 1932/3 election campaigns. Goebbels set up the Reich Radio Company. The Nazis promoted the production of cheap radio sets - the “People's Receiver.” In fact, Germany had the highest percentage of radio owners by 1939. Radio broadcasts were also put out by loudspeakers in public places (cafes, factories, offices etc). Also “Radio wardens” were appointed to make sure people listened. The Nazi's also bought up two-thirds of newspapers by 1939 and a state news agency vetted all news before it reached journalists. So the Nazis made use of and controlled the emerging mass media.

- **Other factors behind the rise of Hitler**

Ian Kershaw does not believe that Hitler's personality and propaganda skills were the only factors in the success of Nazism. He believed this was also due to “the internalization of the ideological goals by a new, modern power-élite, operating alongside weakened old élites through the bureaucratic sophistication of a modern state”¹⁰⁴

The New York Times commented: “The factor that gave his movement this great impetus was the economic crisis that broke over the world in 1929 and struck Germany with particular severity. Nearly 7,000,000 unemployed, added to the millions of impoverished middle-class people and the hundreds of thousands of professionals and jobless intellectuals, provided a setting made to order for Hitler.”¹⁰⁵ After the 1929 Wall Street crash, the US called in its loans to Germany, and the German economy collapsed. Unemployment soared and people were starving on the streets. They wanted someone to blame and someone to be their saviour.

Hitler managed to deceive many Christians. Ian Kershaw writes: “Grotesque as it seems, Hitler himself continued to be widely regarded as a God-fearing and deeply religious man. Even church leaders with a reputation for hostility to Nazism were persuaded of his sincerity, belief in God, and acceptance of the role of Christianity and the churches. Their public avowals of obedience to the Fuhrer and recognition of his leadership and achievements played no small part in helping to give legitimation to the 'Hitler Myth'.”¹⁰⁶

Professor Robert Ericksen has written a book entitled *Theologians under Hitler: Gerhard Kittel, Paul Althaus, and Emanuel Hirsch*. He writes that these well-known Protestant theologians each supported Hitler openly and enthusiastically, and saw God's hand in the elevation of Hitler to power.

Catholic leaders congratulated Hitler on his conquests of the Rhineland, the Sudentenland, Poland, Belgium, Holland and Luxembourg, and the invasion of the Soviet Union. In January 1941 Bishop Kaller of Ermland wrote in a pastoral letter: “In this staunchly Christian spirit we also now participate wholeheartedly in the great struggle of our people for the protection of their life and importance in the world. With admiration we look upon our army, which in courageous fighting under extraordinary leadership has achieved and continues to achieve unparalleled success. We thank God for his support. Especially as Christians we are determined to rally all our strength so that the final victory will be secured

for our fatherland. Especially as believing Christians, inspired by God's love, we faithfully stand behind our Fuhrer who with firm hands guides the fortunes of our people."¹⁰⁷

This indicates the deceptiveness of the antichrist spirit, which manifested itself in Hitler and will be far more powerful in the ultimate Antichrist. As I said above he will seek to display characteristics which parody the true Messiah and deceive those who do not have faith in Christ. He may well for a time deceive Christians too.

Other modern dictators

Professor Barry Rubin writes of modern dictators, as opposed to traditional dictators. These modern dictators claim they are democratic and stress "personal freedom, the right to dissent and debate freely, fair elections, and the due process of law. Their claims receive formal approval at the United Nations and international conferences. Consequently, the most successful representative democracies now exist side by side with the most powerful dictatorships ever known."¹⁰⁸ "A new kind of political regime arose in the Third World: the modern dictatorship that combined populism, nationalism, mobilization, and repression."¹⁰⁹ These modern dictatorships seek to convince "large portion of the people-through persuasion, benefits, and organic links-that they should support it."¹¹⁰ The Egyptian writer Tawfiq al-Hakim wrote of the Nasser regime: "bewitched us with the glitter of hope and intoxicated us with the wine of 'attainment' and 'glory,' and we got so drunk that we lost consciousness."¹¹¹

Rubin says that "As a charismatic leader whose speeches, public personality, physical appearance, and promises must appeal to at least a large section of his people, the modern dictator is already quite different from the traditional dictator, who was indifferent to his public image except purely for the sake of his own ego."¹¹² One of his main attributes is to communicate directly with the masses which is superior to parliamentary democracy. He must show that the old regime is illegitimate and should be rejected. Rubin goes on to refer to modern dictators such as Hitler, Mussolini, Mao Tse Tung, Peron, Nasser, Khomeini and Gaddafi.

Rubin adds: "As the modern dictatorship's ideology recognizes, power springs from controlling and using a wide variety of institutions and channels, including the military, repression, culture, education, ideology, youth and professional organizations, and the media."¹¹³

Conclusion

The rise of Hitler, and other modern dictators, is instructive because it shows how an antichrist figure can arise. Hitler's amazing rise to power and the hugely devastating effect of his leadership shows the power of a demagogue. It illustrates the power of manipulative propaganda which is, in recent decades, very much more powerful in modern media. It shows the strong tendency of human beings to worship the demagogue, given a charismatic personality and gifted rhetoric (and this would especially be the case if he parodied Christlike characteristics). Other factors also may have relevance, such as the need to overcome economic disaster and treatment of "opposition groups" as scapegoats. We none of us know any details about the Antichrist but we can at least see here that the world is more ready for him than it was a century or so ago.

The sudden financial collapse of the world system

Another significant factor in assessing the signs of the end is not one mentioned by Jesus or Paul but rather outlined in the Book of Revelation 18, namely very sudden worldwide economic collapse. It seems to me incontrovertible that such a worldwide collapse has become possible during the last few decades. We have experienced, and are still experiencing, a dramatic indication of this since 2008.

Revelation refers to "Babylon the Great" which in context seems to be the world economic system. In John's vision the angel announces:

"Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great! For all the nations have drunk the maddening wine of her adulteries. The kings of the earth committed adultery with her, and the merchants of the earth grew rich from her excessive luxuries 'When the kings of the earth who committed adultery with her and shared her luxury see the smoke of her burning, they will weep and mourn over her. Terrified at her torment, they will stand far off and cry: "Woe! Woe to you, great city, you mighty city of Babylon! In one hour your doom has come!" 'The merchants of the earth will weep and mourn over her because no one buys their cargoes any more 'They will say, "The fruit you longed for is gone from you. All your luxury and splendour have vanished, never to be recovered." The merchants who sold these things and gained their wealth from her will stand far off, terrified at her torment. They will weep and mourn and cry out: "'Woe! Woe to you, great city, dressed in fine linen, purple and scarlet, and glittering with gold, precious stones and pearls! In one hour such great wealth has been brought to ruin!"

Every sea captain, and all who travel by ship, the sailors, and all who earn their living from the sea, will stand far off. When they see the smoke of her burning, they will exclaim, "Was there ever a city like this great city?" They will throw dust on their heads, and with weeping and mourning cry out: "Woe! Woe to you, great city, where all who had ships on the sea became rich through her wealth! In one hour she has been brought to ruin!"¹¹⁴

The only point I am seeking to make is that the modern global economy is so interconnected and so reliant on speculation that the idea of it collapsing "in one hour" (i.e. in a very short period of time) is quite feasible. This is a new factor and may be understood as preparation for the collapse foretold in Revelation.

Some might respond that we shall learn our lessons from the current economic crisis so that it will not happen again. It seems to me that the evidence of history does not support such a hope. The famous economist, John Kenneth Galbraith, wrote:

"Let it be emphasized once more, and especially to anyone inclined to a personally rewarding skepticism in these matters: for practical purposes, the financial memory should be assumed to last, at a maximum, no more than 20 years. This is normally the time it takes for the recollection of one disaster to be erased and for some variant on previous dementia to come forward to capture the financial mind. It is also the time generally required for a new generation to enter the scene, impressed, as had been its predecessors, with its own innovative genius. Thus impressed, it becomes bemused by the two further influences operating in this world that are greatly seductive of error. The first ... is the ease with which any individual, on becoming affluent, attributes his good fortune to his own superior acumen. And there is the companion tendency.... to presume an exceptional mental aptitude in those who, however evanescently, are identified with wealth. Only in the financial world is there such an efficient design for concealing what, with the passage of time, will reveal itself as self- and general delusion."¹¹⁵

He added that the 1929 crash was an exception to the 20-year rule and led to a "somewhat longer period of doubt, caution, and comparative sanity."¹¹⁶

Similarly, Forrest Capie, Professor of Economics at the CASS Business School, City University, London has written: "Financial crises were frequent in England in the nineteenth century, then disappeared for 100 years, and then they reappeared in the latter part of the twentieth century. The Bank of England and the banking system gradually learned how to deal with and then prevent financial crises and a long period of stability followed. But lessons on all sides get forgotten and crises reappeared...."¹¹⁷

A 2011 report by the Chartered Financial Analyst Society of UK (which represents 9000 investment professionals) warns of "financial amnesia" among finance professionals, arguing that a failure to heed the lessons of the past led to the most recent crisis and will likely lead to future ones. It says: "Financial amnesia disarms individuals, the market and the regulator. It causes risk to be mispriced, bubbles to develop and crises to break."

Simon Jenkins, one time editor of *The Economist*, wrote in the *Guardian* on 15th December 2011 that the western world is in the grip of the second great contraction of modern times, the other being the Great Depression of the 1930s. Both were caused by reckless bank lending. The same methods used to try to emerge from the Great Depression are being used again yet they didn't really work the first time. Jenkins concludes: "The question is not what history says but who is listening. The relaxation of global regulation in the 1980s arose from the influence over government of a profession that was becoming both rich and arrogant. Bankers paid lobbyists and courted politicians. History is clear: as long as sectional interest overrides prudence or common sense, there is another crash."¹¹⁸

So, yet again, we come up against the fact that we learn from history that we learn nothing from history. It seems to me that, despite the shock of the current economic crisis, even if the economy survives, 'Babylon' could easily collapse in the future.

The (relatively) new key factor is the effect of globalisation on economies. Whereas it has immense benefits it also has grave dangers. Globalisation does, of course, inevitably involve the economies of all countries being more interrelated and interdependent than ever before. So, although Britain is not part of the Eurozone, at the height of the current crisis (November 2011) Vince Cable, the Business Secretary warned that the UK Treasury was making contingency plans for the breakup of the euro and an 'Armageddon' scenario, although he didn't think we had reached it yet: "There's a lot of scenario planning in government, thinking about all possible outcomes, and the Treasury is doing that. It affects our trade and potentially, in this Armageddon narrative, it affects the banking system, but we're not there yet."¹¹⁹

Speaking of the possibility of the break up of the Eurozone, Alistair Darling, ex-Chancellor of the Exchequer, said: "This has the seeds of something disastrous. It is madness. If it spreads to bigger countries, this could be really

disastrous for Europe. It could consign us to years of stagnation.”¹²⁰

Charles Dallara, head of the International Institute of Finance, said the damage caused by Greece leaving the Eurozone would be “somewhere between catastrophic and Armageddon.”¹²¹

Chancellor George Osborne said: “The crisis of the eurozone is a real danger to all of Europe's economies, including Britain.”¹²²

Christine Lagarde, head of the International Monetary Fund, said on December 15th 2011: “There is no economy in the world, whether low-income countries, emerging markets, middle-income countries or super-advanced economies, that will be immune to the crisis that we see not only unfolding but escalating.”¹²³

It is clear that the relatively new factor of the globalisation of economics has moved the world to a point where global financial collapse could happen very quickly. “Babylon” could indeed collapse “in one hour.”

CONCLUSION

We have noted that the preliminary and repeated signs of the end are, as expected, very evident. We have also examined the other ‘later’ signs. Persecution of Christians is widespread and has increased. Experience in the West shows that a massive turning away from Christianity can take place within a fairly short period of time. There has been an increase in the number of false messiahs. The world has been extensively evangelized. “Cosmic disturbances” could easily happen and are taken seriously by scientists. The Jewish people have returned to their ancient land. The world is much more prepared for the Antichrist than it was a century or so ago. The modern globalized economic system could collapse quickly.

The evidence points to the fact that the world is much more ready than ever for the one who says: “Yes, I am coming soon.”

“Amen, come Lord Jesus.”

Appendix: N T Wright's Views

Wright does hold that some future event will result in the personal presence of Jesus within God's new creation. However he says:

None of the teaching of Jesus in the gospels (the Olivet Discourse) refers to the second coming. Jesus never spoke about his second coming. That teaching was developed by the early church, particularly Paul, after the ascension. The gospel passages about “the Son of man coming in the clouds” are about his coming from earth to heaven, not from heaven to earth. Daniel 7 depicts the Son of man going upwards not downwards. He says: “I insist that in the New Testament a reference to ‘the son of man coming on the clouds’ is to Jesus’ vindication (in resurrection, ascension, and not least in the destruction of the Jerusalem that had opposed and rejected him) rather than to his return.”¹²⁴ When Acts 1:9-11 says Jesus will come in the same way as the disciples saw him go this looks like a “post-Easter innovation.” Jesus did not teach he would return in glory. Wright states (about the personal, visible return of Christ): “This monstrosity, much beloved (though for different reasons) by both fundamentalists and would-be ‘critical’ scholars, can be left behind. . . . The truly ‘apocalyptic’ ‘son of man’ has nothing to do with such a figure.”¹²⁵

The parables about a returning king, etc., are about God returning to Jerusalem in history, not a future return of Jesus to earth. According to Wright, Jesus “saw his journey to Jerusalem as the symbol and embodiment of YHWH's return to Zion”¹²⁶

The teaching of Mark 13:24-27 about the sun and moon being darkened, the stars falling, (which leads on to the Son of Man coming in the clouds and sending his angels to gather the elect from the four corners of the earth) refers to the destruction of the temple in AD70.

There will be no literal ‘Rapture’ of the saints. The ‘Rapture’ is “a highly charged metaphor, not a literal description.” It is referring to the saints meeting the Lord when he appears on earth at some time in the future and escort him. 1 Thessalonians 4 is only stating that when Jesus returns those who are still alive will be transformed so that their bodies become incorruptible, deathless. The other imagery: the Lord coming down from heaven, the loud command, the voice of the archangel, the trumpet and believers being “caught up together ... in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air” are simply metaphors to enhance his message. It is “a vivid and biblically allusive description of the great transformation of the present world of which he speaks elsewhere.”

The coming of Jesus is simply a screen being removed and his reappearing. It is an unveiling not a physical descent.

It is true that Jesus statement: “Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened” (Matthew 24:34) is a difficulty but ever since at least the fourth century the traditional view has been that Jesus is talking about the end of the world but with a prediction of the destruction of Jerusalem associated with it.

CRITIQUE

Whereas I find some of N T Wright’s comments on eschatology helpful, e.g. on heaven, I do not accept his controversial view that none of the teaching of Jesus in the gospels (the Olivet Discourse) refers to the second coming.

1. It is true that Jesus begins Matthew 24 by talking about the destruction of the temple. But the disciples ask Jesus: “Tell us ... when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?” They are asking two distinct questions: First, when will the temple be destroyed? Second, what will be the sign of Jesus’ coming and the end of the age? They are not just asking about the destruction of the temple.
2. Matthew uses the term “Parousia” – i.e. he says the disciples actually ask Jesus “What will be the sign of your Parousia?” The word is also used in verses 27, 37 and 39. Paul uses the same term of the Second Coming in 1 Cor 15:23; 1 Thess 2:19; 3:13; 4:15; 5:23; 2 Thess 2:1; James 5:7-8; 2 Peter 3:4. It does not therefore seem credible to make a fundamental distinction between the teaching of Jesus and the teaching of Paul in this area, as Wright does, and to say that Jesus is not speaking of his Second Coming.
3. Similarly, both Jesus and Paul refer to the Son of man coming on the clouds (Matt 24:30, 1 Thess 4:17) and to the “thief in the night” metaphor (Matt 24:43-44; 1 Thess 5:2 cf. 2 Peter 3:10). Luke clearly expects a personal return of Jesus: “This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven” (Acts 1:11). The Maranatha prayer shows the early church’s longing for Jesus to return (1 Cor 16:22 cf. Rev 22:20).
4. The descriptions of Jesus’ coming in both the Gospels have a much more universal feel about them rather than only referring to the events of AD70 in Israel cf. Matt 25:30-31..
5. Surely coming of false messiahs deceiving with signs and wonders requires a more spectacular return of Jesus than Wright is describing.
6. I find real difficulty that Wright thinks all the detailed teaching of Jesus about the signs of the times is only about AD70 and so irrelevant to all future generations, except as a historical statement. The same problem is inherent in a historical interpretation to the Book of Revelation which has it all being fulfilled in the first century.
7. There is a good deal of metaphor in apocalyptic language but I find any interpretation which makes everything (or more or less everything) metaphorical inherently unconvincing. This is also true of the a-millennial interpretation of the Book of Revelation. There will be debate as to where metaphor ends, but it seems important that metaphors relate to real events, and not just a few very basic events at that.
8. Wright sees the divine judgment referred to in the NT as not God revealing his wrath but as him changing the whole cosmos into the one it was meant to be. However this really does not seem to do justice to what the NT actually says. It envisages Jesus coming in universal judgment at the end of the age – separating the sheep from the goats, etc. It really can’t be reduced to the Fall of Jerusalem.
9. Robert Stein criticises Wright for squeezing biblical texts into his system, namely his obsession with interpreting the text as relating only to Israel, the Jewish people and first century history.¹²⁷ He gives numerous examples. For example, making friends with one’s accuser before going to court is interpreted as Israel should make peace with Rome lest she be handed over to the judgment and destruction of AD 70. Also building one’s house on rock and not sand refers to the coming destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem and its replacement by Jesus as the true temple. Thirdly Jesus’ warning on the danger of possessions refers to the Jewish people’s love for the land of Israel. Finally, Jesus’ sayings concerning selling one’s possession involves the need of the Jewish people to renounce their nationalistic and idolatrous hopes concerning the land of Israel. It does appear that this sort of interpretation, which is also used over the eschatological passages in the Gospels, is excessive and rather obsessive. Stein gives other examples and says Wright seems to have an intense dislike that Jesus could ever have taught “timeless” truths. Similarly, Wright tends to emphasise that repentance is primarily about national repentance. In fact he says: “Forgiveness of sins is another way of saying ‘return from exile’”¹²⁸ Stein points out that this is difficult to relate to the stories of Zachaeus, the paralytic, the sinful woman etc.
10. Stein also points out that Wright says: “The ‘coming of the son of man’ is thus good first-century metaphorical language for two things: the defeat of the enemies of the true people of God, and the vindication of the true people themselves.”¹²⁹ Stein points out that in the Gospels the Son of man clearly refers to Jesus.

I will stop at that but these are some of the reasons why I believe N T Wright is mistaken and that the passages I have referred to in the main paper, whatever the allusion to the Fall of Jerusalem in AD70, refer to the Second Coming of Jesus which is a spectacular and glorious event in the future.

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