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Jesus, World Crisis & Prophecy: Connected?

By Wilfred Hahn

People often ask whether the Global Financial Crisis (GFC) has any special prophetic significance. Or, could it possibly represent the start or near approach of the Tribulation? Starting with the first question, the answer is mixed—“yes” and “no.” In short, no, the current GFC is not specifically mentioned in Bible prophecy. However, yes, it is significant in the sense that it is part of a progression that is leading to the prophetic fulfillment of conditions described as occurring inside the Tribulation period.



The answer to the second question is a definite “no.” Nonetheless, there are some who think that the GFC is already part of the Tribulation period. While this view cannot at all be supported scripturally, one can certainly agree that some aspects of the current GFC have parallels with various prophecies.

We want to examine further the role of crisis—whether financial or economic—in world history and the Biblical

prophetic timeline. Moreover, just what assurances might Christians today glean from this record?

A World of Continuous Crisis

Seen in the overall picture, the GFC hardly qualifies as being part of a series of events that “[...] never was of old nor ever will be in ages to come” (Joel 2:2). It isn’t unique seen from the perspective of world history. There have been many economic and financial crises in the world before ... some of them much more disas-



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trous, caused by war, plague or natural phenomena (i.e. climatic cooling effects of major volcanic eruptions). Others were classic financial bubbles and busts involving over-indebtedness and money manias. All of these conditions have a long history.

If so, then why do we not read about them in the Bible? Well, actually the Bible does provide accounts of great economic and financial busts, both past and, most crucially, of the future. For example, seven years of plenty were followed by a disastrous 7-year meltdown of the entire economic structure of the then known world. During the time of Joseph in Egypt, the seven lean years certainly qualified as a bust that hugely overshadows the GFC of today.

The Bible speaks of various droughts; for example, one lasting for some 3 1/2 years in Israel during the time of Elijah and King Ahab. That would surely have caused depression-like economic conditions in Israel that would have wiped out a few fortunes.

We do not readily recognize these events as economic and financial histories mainly because the Bible does not describe them in the modern economic terms of our “financially sophisticated” times. We are not told of collapsing debt markets, bankrupt banks, nor the details of possible inflationary conditions. For example, only in extra-Biblical writings is there found any indication of the burdensome inflationary consequences to the huge spending and borrowing binge of King Solomon. That was part of the contributing reason why laborers were grumbling against King Rehoboam. Jeroboam said to him “Your father [Solomon] put a heavy yoke on us” (1 Kings 12:4; 2 Chronicles 10:4).

Indeed, the Bible is often skimpy on financial details and economic backdrops. It would have been interesting to know how some of the prophets sustained themselves. For example, Jeremiah prophesied for a period of some 40 years. Moreover, God required him to buy a property in Anathoth from a cousin,



Hanamel, (Jeremiah 32) just before the Babylonians conquered and sacked Judah. Just how did he make ends meet during his long ministry? He traveled widely and made bad property investments.

We must note, of course, that, Jeremiah was told to buy the property from Hanamel by God, because he was to demonstrate faith in the long-term promise that Judah would be restored after 70 years. He was the ultimate long-term investor. All the same, how did Jeremiah make ends meet during his lifetime?

No doubt, many pastors and others called to ministry would like to know whether Jeremiah was a TFK (a “trust fund kid”), perhaps benefiting from a fortune left to him by a father that was a wealthy scion. We simply are not told. The topic doesn’t come up with any of the prophets. For example, Jonah heads off to Tarshish, loses everything crossing the Mediterranean Sea, yet is able to travel to Nineveh. No mention is made of him first going back to his hometown synagogue to solicit a “love offering” for his redirected mission trip to Nineveh. We are not told of a mission furlough.

From the perspective of the Holy Spirit that inspired the writing of Scripture, these details were not deemed important for us to know. Here, the Bible’s testimony simply and quietly gives evidence of God’s provision. It is assumed, as it is deemed to be obvious. If we are called to do something for the Lord, He will also make a way, provided that we practice sensible stewardship.

One of the few (if not only) cases where God is shown to intervene miraculously is with Elijah (1 Kings 17:4). Not only was he fed by ravens that were divinely sent to bring him his daily meat



and bread, but he was also later nourished by the woman of Zaraphath with the ever-replenishing jar of oil (1 King 17:14). God did not shower Elijah with wine and rich foods (nor with three Mercedes automobiles and a sumptuous mansion, as some contemporaries who claim they are called by God seem to demand today), but simply that which was sufficient.

God’s Purpose in Crises

The times of great economic crisis mentioned in the Old Testament all were part of God’s workings.

Even more interesting to learn is the global economic and financial backdrop that existed at the time of Jesus Christ. Nowhere in the Gospels is found any direct mention or description of the general economic backdrop during that time. Again, we must look to sources outside of the Bible. Doing so, we discover an interesting fact. The financial backdrop during almost the entirety of Jesus’ life was one of global financial turmoil.

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Here is an account of the financial problems of Rome that led up to a major banking crisis in 33 A.D., taken from Chapter 15 of Will Durant's *Caesar and Christ: A History of Roman Civilization and of Christianity from Their Beginnings to A.D. 325*:

The famous 'panic' of A.D. 33 illustrates the development and complex interdependence of banks and commerce in the Empire. Augustus had coined and spent money lavishly, on the theory that its increased circulation, low interest rates, and rising prices would stimulate business. They did; but as the process could not go on forever, a reaction set in as early as 10 B.C., when this flush minting ceased. Tiberius rebounded to the opposite theory that the most economical economy is the best. He severely limited the governmental expenditures, sharply restricted new issues of currency, and hoarded 2,700,000,000 sesterces in the Treasury.

The resulting dearth of circulating medium was made worse by the drain of money eastward in exchange for luxuries. Prices fell, interest rates rose, creditors foreclosed on debtors, debtors sued usurers, and money-lending almost ceased. The Senate tried to check the export of capital by requiring a high percentage of every senator's fortune to be invested in Italian land; senators thereupon called in loans and foreclosed mortgages to raise cash, and the crisis rose. When the senator Publius Spinther notified the bank of Balbus and Ollius that he must withdraw 30,000,000 sesterces to comply with the new law, the firm announced its bankruptcy.

At the same time the failure of an Alexandrian firm, Seuthes and Son due to their loss of three ships laden with costly spices and the collapse of the great dyeing concern of Malchus at Tyre, led to rumors that the Roman banking house of Maximus and Vibo would be broken by their extensive loans to these firms. When its depositors began a "run" on this bank it shut its doors, and later on that day a larger bank, of the Brothers Pettius, also suspended payment. Almost simultaneously came news that great banking establishments had failed in Lyons, Carthage, Corinth, and Byzantium. One after another the banks of Rome closed. Money could be borrowed only at rates far above the legal limit. Tiberius finally met the crisis by suspending the land-investment act and distributing 100,000,000 sesterces to the banks, to be lent without interest for three years on the security of realty. Private lenders were thereby constrained to lower their interest rates, money came out of hiding, and confidence slowly re-turned.

If you followed the above account, it should be noted that it took some years for these described developments to finally culminate in a catastrophic and interconnected banking crisis that cascaded through the known world at that time. Indeed, it was a global financial crisis. Most surely, at least part of these events occurred while Jesus was still alive, late in his time of ministry on earth.

Tacitus, the Roman historian of that era, provides the most detailed account in *The Annals* (VI, 16-17). He tells us of the response by Emperor Tiberius:

The destruction of private wealth precipitated the fall of rank and reputation, till at last the emperor interposed his aid by distributing throughout the banks a hundred million sesterces, and allowing freedom to borrow without interest for three years, pro-



vided the borrower gave security to the State in land to double the amount. Credit was thus restored, and gradually private lenders were found.

As then, various central banks today are following the same policies... flooding the monetary system with money, depressing interest rates and devising special terms to induce the flow of money and credit. The size of official Roman interventions were enormous—figures in the hundreds of millions of sesterces (a Roman monetary unit).

Could this Roman-world financial crisis have peaked in the very year that Christ was crucified? The bankruptcies of various banks had already begun in 32 A.D., continuing into 33 A.D. The exact date of the crucifixion of Christ is April 14, 33 A.D. (exactly fitting the prophecies of Daniel). As such, we can confirm that an ancient “GFC” was indeed raging across the Roman world toward the end of Jesus’ time on earth.

Thoughts to Ponder

Could it be that Jesus Christ will return at a time similar to when He left—during times of global financial crisis? What we do know, according to the two angels that appeared following the Ascension, is that “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).

Most certainly, Jesus’ final return at the end of the Tribulation period will occur at a time of global devastation and economic collapse. Jesus, however, will also appear in the air at an earlier time. He said, “I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there



ye may be also” (John 14:3). Here He points to the Rapture. And so today, many Christians apparently hope that the Rapture will occur before such a great financial crisis unfolds ... perhaps even hoping this might occur before the Global Financial Crisis worsens.

The Rapture is imminent, potentially occurring at any moment. We therefore do not know its hour. However, it seems not unreasonable to believe that just as Christ “was taken from you into heaven”—in other words, from believers who were looking up as he ascended into heaven—that those who will be received into heaven by Him in the Rapture, will also be looking upwards ... not trapped and focused upon any worldly financial crisis.

A non-worldliness was implored by Paul: “What I mean, brothers, is that the time is short. From now on [...] those who buy something, as if it were not theirs to keep; those who use the things of the world, as if not engrossed in them. For this world in its present form is passing away” (1 Corinthians 7:29-31).

Contrary to the promises of globalists, demagogues, false prophets and varied other hucksters and pied pipers, no heaven will be achieved on earth by mankind. In its present form, the world will pass away. We “[...] lift up [our] heads, because [our] redemption is drawing near” (Luke 21:28). ^{MC}

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