

“LOOK TO THE NATIONS AND WATCH”

“I am going to do something in your days that you would not believe even if you were told”.

Habakkuk 1:5

Introduction

This booklet begins with a short study of the book of Habakkuk, drawing out the features which are particularly relevant to the times in which we live. Habakkuk lived in an age in which one superpower, Assyria, was displaced by another, Babylon. They were momentous and dangerous times for the Judah in which Habakkuk lived and prophesied. In our generation we are witnessing a similar situation in which a long-time benign superpower, the U.S.A. is being challenged by the growth of another superpower, China, which is fast becoming the greatest power the world has ever seen. How benign this new superpower will prove to be is a matter for deep concern for all of us. Whether its challenge to America will be peaceful or otherwise will have world-wide consequences. Will it bring blessing or, as was the case in the situation Habakkuk faced, will it bring strife and judgement to this world? This is the concern addressed briefly in the latter part of this booklet.

1. A Study in the Book of Habakkuk

The prophet Habakkuk has a very important message and a searching challenge for our generation. He was a godly prophet, deeply concerned for his nation, the Jewish kingdom of Judah. At the beginning of his book of we find him earnestly praying over the plight of Judah. He was distressed by what he saw around him and was desperately seeking God that things might change for the better. Everywhere he looked he saw evidence of violence, injustice, and wrongdoing. There was strife, conflict and a “paralysis of the law”. Everywhere “the wicked hemmed in the righteous”. He was frustrated and dismayed that God did not seem to be answering his prayers, but rather that things seemed to be getting worse. So, the book of Habakkuk opens with a loud intercessory cry to God of “*Why?*” and “*How long must I cry out?*” It was a genuine cry from a genuine heart. It was a cry he had uttered for a considerable time (Habakkuk 1:2-4).

God did answer his cry, but not in the way he might have expected, or would have wanted. Quite the contrary. He was told in fact to turn his eyes away from his own country and look at the wider world around him: he was told to “**look to the nations**”. God said that he would be amazed at what he saw and would find it very difficult to believe what was going to happen among those nations. God was doing something that would have severe judgemental repercussions on Judah. (Habakkuk 1:5)

When Habakkuk looked at the nations, he would have seen a world dominated by the Assyrian empire. It stretched from Egypt in the south to Turkey in the north and to Mesopotamia in the east. His own country, Judah, was under its domination and had been paying tribute to Assyria for about a century. This was the same Assyria that several decades earlier had completely wiped Judah’s sister nation, Israel, off the map . Judah had learned painfully to live under its oppressive rule. But now God was about to reveal to Habakkuk that all this was going to

change. God simply said to him, *"I am raising up the Babylonians"* (Habakkuk 1:6ff), and Habakkuk immediately grasped the implications. Babylon had been subject to Assyria along with Judah and all the other nations of the region, but now it was going to take over as the leading power. **There would be a major change on the international scene; the world was moving on and there would be a new world power.**

Habakkuk recoiled from this revelation, for, after the simple statement that Babylon would be *"raised up"*, God, at much greater length and in much greater detail, went on to give Habakkuk a reminder of what sort of people the Babylonians were: *"ruthless and impetuous people ... who seize dwellings which are not their own ... a feared and dreaded people...they gather prisoners like sand they mock at kings and laugh at fortified cities"*. Habakkuk recognised clearly what God was implying in this vivid description. He immediately responded with the words *"You, my Lord, have appointed them to execute judgement; you, my Rock, have ordained them to punish."* He knew that this change of world power would not be peaceful but would bring severe and painful chastisement to Judah. There would be war and bloodshed as Babylon established its new control, and Judah would have a new and unpleasant master.

This revelation did not relieve Habakkuk's distress, but rather increased it. He was not looking for judgement, and certainly not from such a godless people as the Babylonians. The rest of the book of Habakkuk is the story of how he came to accept and be reconciled with the revelation God had given him. He was left with the task of speaking to Judah the unpleasant message that it would suffer under the Babylonians, but at the same time he was to preserve for Judah the prophetic hope that eventually judgement would come on the Babylonians themselves.

We do not know precisely when Habakkuk received this word from the Lord, but we do know from historical sources the details of the rise of Babylon that took place during his lifetime, and we know that it was very swift. It might well have already started to happen when God spoke to him, though the prophet may not have noticed it. History tells us that in the mid-620's BC. (during Habakkuk's lifetime) the huge, seemingly unassailable Assyrian empire was locked in an internal power struggle among its leadership and was tottering. The Babylonians took the opportunity to rebel and actually defeated an Assyrian army. They gradually grew in strength and ten years later they captured the Assyrian capital, Nineveh, and destroyed it. When the Egyptians marched to help Assyria, the Babylonians roundly defeated them (605 BC.). Babylon was master, and the Assyrian empire became the Babylonian empire. It had taken a mere fifteen to twenty years. It was an astonishing "turn about".

Judah was caught up in the frightening swirl of these major events. By 603 BC Judah's king had become the puppet of Babylon. Foolishly he rebelled and in 597 Jerusalem was besieged and taken by the Babylonians who acted ruthlessly. The royal family and the leading citizens were all taken to Babylon as hostage along with enormous booty. A new Jewish king was installed in Jerusalem but failed to keep his rebellious nobles in order and finally led a further rebellion against Babylon in 588 BC. Jerusalem then suffered the agonies of more than a year of siege, and when it was finally taken the city was put to the torch and its walls levelled. Leading figures were executed and a further large portion of its populace deported to Babylon. Habakkuk's fears had proved to be justified. Judah had indeed been taken by a *"feared and dreaded people"*, a people *"appointed to bring judgement"*.

The "World-Wide" Setting of Habakkuk's Prophecy

Habakkuk's prophecy, therefore, has as its setting a "world-wide" background where major powers and empires are at work. Its lessons for us can only be properly appreciated by taking note of and having some understanding of that world-wide scene. The same can be also said of most of the great Old Testament prophets. The reason for this is simply that, though God might bring his judgements in the form of plagues or famines and other natural disasters, the major judgements that he visited on ungodly nations at that period came primarily through the "sword" (war) and through conquest and violent oppression. Thus, it had been the rise of the Assyrian superpower in the 8th century BC that destroyed the Jewish northern Kingdom, and likewise it was the rise of the Babylonians in the 7th century B.C. that destroyed Judah. When we take the trouble to put our own present national historical situation into this bigger context some very important lessons emerge for us.

If we are to properly understand God's pattern of judgement in the modern world it is very important for us to be aware of the "world scene" or we might miss what he is doing. In fact, one might say that at the moment in our own era there is not a more relevant word for us than that which God gave to Habakkuk; "Look to the nations and watch; I am going to do something in your days that you would not believe..."

God's Sovereign Control of Nations

Before looking more closely at this, however, some general implications from Habakkuk about God and the nations need to be noted. The first is that God controls the movements of nations. He causes them to rise and to fall, and He causes them to prosper or decline. "*I am raising up the Babylonians*" is a very prominent statement and indicates the directing presence of the divine hand in the history of the rise and fall of nations. God is not simply telling Habakkuk that the Babylonians will rise up; he is saying categorically that he himself is raising them up, that he is personally responsible for their rise to power. He also makes it plain that in due course he will cause Babylon to fall. God is in control.

This does not mean, of course that we cannot trace the human historical processes by which nations rise and fall – there is a "history" to the rise and fall of the British Empire and we can gain profitable understanding in seeking how and why it happened at the human level. The Bible itself tells a "human" story as well but goes to a deeper level and brings God directly into the story. At that deeper level it is God who brings Empires into prominence and then demotes them. So, when it comes to the Assyria which the Babylonians displaced, the prophet Isaiah had these words to say: "*Woe to the Assyrian, the rod of my anger, in whose hand is the club of my wrath! I send him against a godless nation (Israel), I dispatch him against a people who anger me (and) When the Lord has finished all his work against Mount Zion and Jerusalem, I will punish the king of Assyria for the wilful pride of his heart*" (Isaiah 10:5 ff). This prophecy concerned a particular nation at a particular time. Jeremiah announced it as a general principle, "*If at any time I announce that a nation is to be uprooted, torn down and destroyed, and if that nation I warned repents of its evil, then I will relent and not inflict on it the disaster I had intended*" (Jeremiah 18:7ff).

The fact is that this fundamental control of nations by God is written large in every part of the Old Testament – from Job and the Psalms, through all the history books and in all the prophets. The rise and fall of nations is always a "God-thing!" If this simple truth is not fully grasped then

no matter how much we look at the nations we shall be unable to fully understand spiritually what God is wanting us to see. The movements among national "Powers" is of his appointing.

A second implication is that the rise and fall of nations is not a haphazard procedure on God's part. They rise and fall in accordance with whether or not they adhere to the moral demands which God requires from them. God expects that nations should understand basic moral imperatives and when they do not fulfil them, they are brought low. This does not necessarily mean that every time God causes a nation to rise that nation must be godly. Indeed, it could be quite the reverse. The Babylonians were idolatrous and ungodly, but they were raised up as a scourge to an Assyria which had grossly flouted the standards of morality that God expected of it. But the Babylonians in turn suffered for their own cruelties.

A third implication is that a nation might be raised up to bring a blessing on another nation. Thus, Cyrus the Persian ruler is called the "*anointed one of God*" and eventually broke the power of Babylon and freed the Jews from exile to go back to their land.

2. China - The Rising World Power

"Let China sleep; when she wakes, she will shake the world." - Napoleon 1817

"China - The biggest Player in the History of the World." - Lee Kuan Yew, Premier and founder of modern Singapore, and mentor to world leaders.

When we look around the world of the first two decades of our new millennium, we do not need a prophet to tell us which great power God is raising up in our times. It is plain for all to see – China. Forty years ago, the first stirrings were noticeable but now the giant is pretty well fully awake and beginning to flex its muscles. The world order is rapidly changing and indeed beginning to shake. In historical terms it has happened very quickly indeed, very much like the rise of Babylon or Assyria in Biblical times.

The "Sleeping Giant"

When Napoleon uttered his comment in 1817, China had been "asleep" for some 300 years. It had been a long sleep. In fact, it had lasted practically the whole of what historians call the "Modern Period" of history. However, prior to that, in the Medieval Period, China had been a highly cultured, refined and technologically advanced empire. It had a population three times the size of Europe and an army of one million men; it enjoyed fertile, well-irrigated plains, linked by a remarkable canal system and under an administration of well-educated Confucian scholars. It had sophisticated printing and a great many libraries. It had larger cities than Europe and more of them. Trade (both at home and overseas) and industry were flourishing. By the year 1420 it had already discovered gunpowder and fired cannons. It had a navy of some 1,350 combat vessels, which included some very large vessels. These ships freely roamed the Indian Ocean as far as the Red Sea and East Africa, and also sailed the Western Pacific Ocean as far as Korea and Japan. China saw itself as the dominant power and called itself the "Middle Kingdom" by which it meant it was the centre of civilisation and the nation to which all others must needs "kowtow". By the year 1500, however, all this was in decline. For various reasons China "decided to turn its back on the world". Maritime trade was considered an unworthy pursuit by the Confucian mandarins, and a navy unnecessary for security. It spurned trading overtures

from an 18C English monarch, ignored the technology of Europe and turned inwards and, as far as the rest of the world was concerned, largely “slept”!

“The Rude Awakening”

The nineteenth century, however, saw the beginnings of a rude, painful, and drawn-out awakening that lasted well into the twentieth century. It began with the invasive trading ventures of aggressive European nations who were determined to trade with China even if its government was unwilling. In 1839 and 1856 Britain initiated two wars which obliged China to allow the sale of opium. In 1898 the British secured a lease on the Hong Kong territories. The adjacent Macau had already been leased to Portugal. The Germans obtained a lease on land further north and much nearer to Beijing in 1897. The French were also involved in the second opium war and were party to the burning of the Emperor’s palace in Beijing. They also had major influence in the territory just south of Hong Kong. Gun boats from the U.S.A. roamed the large northern Chinese rivers. A Japanese resurgence saw it nibbling off pieces of territory in and near China.

In view of what was happening to their country, it is not surprising that there was unrest among the Chinese people. As the 20th century dawned, in 1912, the Qing Dynasty which ruled the country was overthrown and a Republic was declared. Its rulers proved ineffective, however, and regional “warlords” held sway. In 1937 the situation worsened very considerably when Japan (which unlike China had modernised itself industrially) seriously began to invade the valuable but vulnerable Eastern provinces of China and seized the main coastal cities and most important economic areas. The Chinese response was ineffective and divided. It could not defeat the Japanese cruel and rapacious forces, and only the immensity of its size kept China from complete conquest. China was probably at the lowest point of its history, suffering what has become known to its people as its **“Great Humiliation”** - that gross deprecation over many decades by other nations who in the true order of things should have acknowledged it as the greatest of kingdoms .

Further Traumas

However, yet a further painful “waking” trauma was in store, for in 1946 China broke out into full scale civil war. In the 1920’s two major political forces had emerged in the nation: The Nationalist party (the Guomindang) and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). They were armed, and throughout the struggle against the Japanese there had been intermittent fighting against each other. In 1946 there was more bitter fighting between them which lasted until 1949 when, despite American support, the Guomindang were defeated and took refuge in Taiwan where they set up as an alternative Chinese state. China proper became fully Communist under the leadership of Mao Zedong who was to rule China until his death in 1976. But even this period proved to be another time of convulsion, weakness, and pain. After consolidating control over the country, Mao began a social reconstruction on the Soviet model with communes and collectivisation, followed by his “Great Leap Forward” and ending with ten years of the “Cultural Revolution”. These proved to be, however, times of deep trauma, famine, and distress socially and economically, with much loss of life.

The Defining Turning Point – Deng Xiaoping, 1977.

Deng Xiaoping was a dedicated Communist leader but suffered greatly from the purges and constant stream of “revolution” that Mao Zedong unleashed, particularly in the Cultural

Revolution. Exiled twice, and with a son who was rendered a paraplegic by the brutality of “Red Guards”, he was re-instated in 1977 after Mao’s death. He had a radical new vision of what China needed. He had come to reject all the “orthodoxies” of the Mao years; too many mistakes had been made. He drew inspiration from the growing “economic tigers” of East Asia, like Singapore and Japan. He said that the people needed to be given a stake in what they produced, consumer goods needed to be put before heavy industry, the ingenuity of Chinese farmers needed to be liberated, the communist Party needed to be less intrusive and government should be decentralised. In addition, he said modern technology had to be introduced to China, and tens of thousands of Chinese students should be sent abroad since there was nothing to be feared but everything to be gained from Western education. He began a period of reform in which China was opened to the influence of the capitalist West and began to grow at an unparalleled and enormous speed economically.

Xi Jinping 2012– The Giant flexes its muscles.

Xi Jinping became the President of China in 2012. He set out to extend the work on the economy that Deng had done and to build on it. Again, enormous progress was made economically. His vision, however, was stronger and more far reaching than Deng’s. In the year he assumed the Presidency he announced, “The greatest Chinese dream is the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation”. It soon became clear that he was a man driven by an indomitable determination to regain China’s past greatness and make it the world leader. The influential Premier of Singapore, watching Xi’s gradual rise to power, and speaking to other national leaders said simply, “*Watch this man*”. It was not just his grand vision that impressed, but a recognition of the sheer capability and ambition of Xi Jinping. Like Deng before him, he had come as a youngster through a very hard school of suffering under Mao and had become hardened, determined and a great exponent of playing the Chinese “long game”. A lifetime of service in the Communist Party, working his way up the ranks, had revealed a high level of political and diplomatic skills, and also the practical skills to make things happen. Behind a quiet, acceptable face lay a determined, strong, and ruthless intent. Though open to the economic structures of the West he remained utterly committed to Communist Party rule.

As soon as he assumed office, he immediately began to strengthen his power base. At the heart of his vision of national greatness lay the recognition that he needed first to have a firm grip on all the “machinery” of the Communist Party, and second that the Party needed to have a firm grip on the nation. Within two years of becoming President, he had so firmly concentrated power in his own hands that he was known as the “*Chairman of Everything*”. Through what he called an anti-corruption campaign he purged hundreds of powerful rivals and took all the main senior ruling titles for himself including chief of the military and chief of national security. He was designated “core” leader, a new term. Just a few years later, having side-lined any possible successor or deputy he was able to get Party approval as Premier for life. He also made sure that the PLA (The People’s Liberation Army), the Chinese armed forces, were totally under the Party control. Thus, Xi Jinping has become the “supreme autocrat” with absolute power. There is no room in his thinking for anything other than his own dictatorial rule as the head of a one-party system. He was convinced, like Deng, that the sort of political freedoms that were being demanded by the students in Tiananmen Square would cause political chaos and rob China of its progress. The nation needed authoritarian rule.

In the nation at large he has mounted a vast propaganda effort for his own popular cult, not unlike the North Korean rulers. But he also knows that his vision of making China the number

one nation in the world has huge appeal for the Chinese people. There is a very strong patriotic heart among the Chinese (which he is encouraging as much as possible), which is longing to see a complete reversal of China's Century of Humiliation. He knows that as long as people are prospering and have reasonable freedoms they will support a strong autocratic regime for such a goal. Appealing to this and extending the prosperity of the nation has enabled him to tighten his grip on anything in the nation that seems dissident to his rule. Both the Christian church and the Uighur Moslems have felt the pressure of this.

In the world at large he has sought in similar manner to secure an equally strong economic base. The massive and expensive Road and Belt initiative creating infrastructural transport links with the Middle east, Europe and on to Africa has facilitated huge trading opportunities for China and given China a great deal of "soft power" influence. Xi is working hard to make sure that China has access to the ever-dwindling raw materials that a huge nation needs to survive and grow, and also access to the markets in which its products can be sold.

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How big is this Giant?

First, it has a **population** of one and a quarter billion people, the largest in the world. That is almost four times the population of the U.S.A. and eight times that of Russia. At the beginning of the twentieth century, it numbered about 500 million. So, as it woke up the giant has grown rapidly and enormously. A large population is a fundamental basis of "power" for a nation. Just as important as the sheer numbers, however, is the fact that China has become a cohesive and united nation over those years in a way it has never been for many centuries. There is a great sense of identity and pride in being Chinese and a great sense of patriotism in its endeavours. Its nearest rival in population, India, has nothing of the social cohesion of China, nor China's ambition for power. Moreover, it is an energetic and able population, industrialised, educated and mostly living in many large cities. Its communication infrastructure is now among the best in the world. In no sense is it a backward nation.

Economically it is a giant. In assessing the power of a nation, the bottom line is always its economy. Over the last forty years the Chinese economy has grown to a point where it has virtually caught up with the U.S.A. Another decade will see it become the biggest in the world. This is not simply in manufacturing. It is ahead in science, super-computing, and research, and has landed its own "vehicle" on the moon. This technologically advanced economy is the essential basis of its **military power**. Not only can China put huge numbers of men into uniform, but its forces can be equipped with a vast amount of new and sophisticated weaponry, nuclear, cyber, and conventional. This is well advanced by now, and in another decade or so will be overwhelming. China has never been fully conquered; it is now stronger than it has ever been.

Does it have any weaknesses?

The huge population itself poses a problem. It has to be fed, and its appetite for the good things of modern life has to be met. Unrest among its people has to be avoided. Xi's government is making great efforts to try make China self-contained as much as possible, but it needs great quantities of food and raw materials of every kind which makes that aim very difficult. That could lead it to be over aggressive.

A much more dangerous weakness lies in its political structure. The strong personal autocratic rule of Xi, hides great dangers. Very few leaders who have reached such a point have escaped

the onset and increase of paranoia. More importantly, there is no doubt that his purging of thousands of senior figures has left him with many powerful enemies, and he is highly dependent on a vast systematic surveillance, which he has been obliged to build up and maintain. Furthermore, as Lord Acton, the great historian, commented, "All power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely". He could himself become the victim of the very corruption he seeks to eradicate from his Party. In addition, by taking so much to himself and not being clear about the succession of leadership, he exposes the country to the vagaries of a disputed succession and the turmoil that can very quickly arise when the time comes for a new person in the lead. Powerful though he may be, he himself could become the weak spot.

Xi's great problem and major fear is the need to keep control of China. He knew himself only too well that the demise of the U.S.S.R. was largely due to the loss of control by the Russian Communist Party, and its failure to handle the demand for freedoms. He has very strongly impressed that fact on his co-leaders. Moreover, he must know that his severe authoritarian behaviour and relentless "purging" has left him many enemies among the Chinese Communist elite. He may have power but he cannot never feel secure.

An Aggressive Giant?

There can be no doubt that China's attitude and actions are becoming increasingly aggressive, and blatantly so. This is dangerous. Xi's attitude and intentions are best revealed in the events in **Hong Kong** which have clearly demonstrated his rough, authoritarian, and uncompromising hand. Britain handed back the territory to China in 1997 with a legal agreement that its "one country, two systems" should remain for 50 years. When Hong Kong people opposed a Communist clamp-down on this agreement Xi responded by imposing a total Chinese authoritarian rule in the territory, with many people imprisoned and freedoms lost. This was an act of "raw power" on Xi's part. Very significantly, despite strictures from numerous nations, he has got away with it, but the world is a little bit more wary of the nature of the giant, though perhaps not wary enough. For some observers Xi's aggressive attitude can be seen even more plainly in the extremely harsh, near-genocidal treatment of the Moslem Uighur people of China's most western and turbulent province. China retaliates to criticism of its actions with loud bullying denials.

If it is true that the severe authoritarian behaviour of Xi Jinping has raised serious concerns among many of the Chinese Communist elite, it is equally true that his behaviour has raised concern among a growing number of nations with whom China has been trading. The fact is that, unlike Deng, he has begun to put pressure on nations that do things that displease him. Australia, for example, has been economically penalised for demanding a proper World Health Organisation investigation into the origin of the Coronavirus outbreak, and there are many more other countries that have felt a similar heavy hand. So much so, that conversations have begun between countries about the need to restrain the "Giant".

3. What Lies Ahead in the World?

“The sudden emergence of a nation comprising a full fifth of humanity as a new great power is a unique event”.

William Hague

The Basic Issue

Numerous writers have identified that the single greatest problem in the world lies in the fact that in our age we have seen China, a new superpower, growing rapidly and threatening to usurp the control of the current greatest superpower, the United States. This confrontation is recognised as a classic recurring historical situation fraught with dangers, the worst of which is that armed hostility might break out with devastating results. There have been numerous parallels in history, but nothing remotely on the scale of what is happening in our times. Though such rivalries have not always resulted in war, there have been occasions when such rivalry has resulted in war. World War 1 was one example of the latter, when an arms race between Germany and Britain led finally to untold slaughter in many battlefield trenches. More recently, in 1945, at the close of the Second World War, the United States (the acknowledged leading superpower) was faced with a new and very powerful USSR which had occupied large parts of Eastern Europe including half of Germany. The Iron Curtain dropped over Europe and the occupied territories of the Eastern half became Communist. Large armies faced each other and a nuclear arms race began. We experienced a “Cold War”. Mercifully, a recognition of the sheer mutual destructive possibilities of nuclear conflict kept the peace. Eventually, the Russian economy collapsed, and the demand for freedoms by the Russian people led to the collapse of the Communist dictatorship. That collapse was only some thirty years ago, in 1989. Russia remains powerful and a malign influence in the world, but no match for the growing China.

In its rise to power China has some very clear ambitions which could cause conflict with the United States. These ambitions centre largely on the Eastern seaboard of China, and, more widely, on the control of the Western Pacific which American sea power has dominated since 1945. China has openly announced its determination to gain control of these waters and will undoubtedly seek every opportunity to do so. The occupation of the numerous small islands scattered among these waters, and in particular the much larger island of Taiwan are the main focus of its intent. Some islands have already been seized and militarised. Skirmishes with Japan, Vietnam and the Philippines have taken place. China has refused to acknowledge these waters are international, and has tried to curtail free passage, and awaits its opportunity to take control. America has militarily backed up Taiwanese independence and Japan. The situation is clearly a possible flash point for a larger confrontation. Will China be able to nibble away and gain control knowing that America will not want a full-scale conflict? Or will hostilities escalate?. Chinese obduracy is the main problem.

We have to reckon also with the deeper problem that the culture, the political system and the values of freedom are completely different and opposite to each other in these two superpowers. China’s Communists will not give up their authoritarian control and will not acknowledge American values and freedoms. There is a huge ideological battle underlying the rivalry which very much aggravates the situation.

Some Serious Questions and “Unknowns”

The future course of the nations is probably couched best in a series of questions similar to that posed above about the China Seas. There are no easy answers to these questions.

1. **Will the strong Chinese political structure and unity prevail or collapse?** Will Xi's succession bring disorder and weakness? Will China eventually succumb to an increasing call for freedoms from the Chinese people? Will China be able to continue to expand and consolidate its economy?
2. **Will the U.S.A. and other nations be able to present a united front to aggression**, or are they too caught up and dependent on the economic empire China has built?
3. Will the **Chinese “bullying”** overstep the mark and produce a spark to conflict? Will it continue to play the “Long Game”?
4. For how long **will the U.S.A. have sufficient armed power** to withstand Chinese aggression? Will the social and economic “decline” that is beginning to be observed in the U.S.A. as a nation continue even as that of China grows?

THE FINAL WORD

All these questions naturally arise when we look at the situation with human eyes and abilities. There is nothing wrong in weighing up the situation from a human point of view and seeking to act with wisdom. But the essential fact is that all **the outcomes to these issues are to be found in the hands and purposes of God.** He it is who ultimately releases war and He brings peace. The real factor which decides which way the events will eventually fall out, whether “for good” or “for evil” is to be found in the moral behaviour of the people of the nations that are the actors in this world drama. God brings peace to the righteous, and he brings judgement and chastisement to the wicked, both at individual and national level. He has always throughout history worked on that principle and will continue to do so.

Whether or not China will become an instrument of severe judgement or not is entirely a matter that lies in the hand of God. The possibility, however, should be very much a matter for concern for all of us.

5. “Watch and Pray”

We are called not merely to watch what is happening in the world but to pray. Two Scriptures stand out in this respect:-

1. **“Lord, I have heard of your fame; I stand in awe of you deeds, LORD. Repeat them in our day, in our time make them known; In wrath remember mercy”**

(Habakkuk 3:2)

2. **“I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgivings be made for all people – for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good, and pleases God our Saviour, who wants all people to be saved , and to come to a knowledge of the truth”**

(1Timothy 2:1-4)