

September 5, 2003

Dear Brethren,

We are all looking forward with anticipation as the time for the Feast of Tabernacles rapidly approaches. Even before the Feast, which is just five weeks away, come the Feast of Trumpets and the Day of Atonement.

These two days, which we observe annually based upon the instruction and command of the Eternal God, picture very important events we commemorate each year at the appointed times for our edification.

The Feast of Trumpets, of course, portrays the very return of Jesus Christ to the earth for the purpose of establishing the Kingdom of God here on earth and to save mankind from total destruction. Today, conditions on earth are totally contrary to what God desires for mankind. Yet, conditions will continue to worsen before the return of Christ. Then, there will come a point when God will determine that the time has come when Christ must intervene to stop man from destroying himself completely!

Christ discussed many of these conditions with His disciples as He sat and spoke with them on the Mount of Olives. We find this discussion in Matthew 24:3–51. Christ noted in this prophecy several key conditions which would exist just prior to His return to the earth.

He stated that we would find this time to be a time of apostasy (verses 4–5, 11). It would also be a time of anarchy (verses 6–8), a time of affliction (verses 9–10), a time of apathy (verses 12–13), but also a time of accomplishment (verse 14). Notice that Christ speaks here of a work being accomplished!

Christ continued in this prophecy to show that wickedness toward God and man would continue to grow (verses 15–26). The abomination of desolation will take place during these times (verse 15). The time of the Tribulation on the earth, which depicts Satan's wrath (Rev. 12:12), will begin and will last for two and one half years followed by the Heavenly Signs and then the Day of the Lord, a year of which will be completed prior to Christ's return—a total of three and one-half years of chaos on the earth (verses 21–22). (See, also, our booklet "The Great Tribulation and the Day of the Lord," page 19).

Because the wickedness of man continues to increase, God will intervene on behalf of His people and all of mankind. Just prior to the beginning of the Tribulation, Christ will have His elect gathered together in a "place of safety" (verses 16–20, 28). After the Tribulation is completed, God will begin to pour out His wrath upon the face of the earth (verse 29). This period is the beginning of the Day of the Lord.

As these events begin to unfold the Heavenly Signs appear with the sun being darkened, the moon giving off no light, and many other cosmic events occur in the heavens. Then God's people will be sealed from all God is about to unleash upon the face of the earth. God will carry out this phase of His Plan through His mighty angels as is described in the book of Revelation and in other prophecies found in the books of the prophets. God has allocated one year for this purpose of affecting His wrath upon the earth, thus completing a total of three and one half years of destruction, encompassing the Tribulation and the Day of the Lord.

Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven and all the earth will see this event taking place. As the Scriptures point out, when they see this they will mourn! All of mankind will see Christ as He comes on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory (verse 30). At this juncture, Christ's angels will gather up His elect from around the earth, all of the dead in Christ shall rise and all living in Christ who survived the Tribulation will join them and they will all be transformed from physical beings into spiritual beings and will be filled with God's Holy Spirit. They will all meet Christ in the air as He comes to establish His Kingdom on the earth!

We can observe from Christ's instructions that many things must occur in a short period of time; all before Christ actually establishes the Kingdom on the earth!

1. The publishing of the gospel must be completed.
2. The Abomination of Desolation must take place.
3. The Great Tribulation and the Heavenly Signs must occur.
4. The Day of the Lord must begin. (See our booklet "The Great Tribulation and The Day of the Lord," pages 48,52-53)
5. And, the second coming of Christ will then occur.

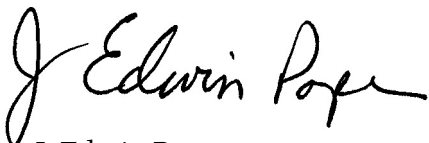
Of these five major events, we find ourselves in the final stages of the first event. It is critical that we continue in this work to which we have been called until Christ clearly reveals that our work is complete. We must remember that the work has always been defined as the publishing of the gospel and the teaching of those God has chosen to be a part of the work. That job is certainly not complete as of this date.

We must all remain diligent in carrying out our part in this work with our prayers and fastings, with our tithes and offerings, and with our love and concern for one another. Of course, our personal example to the world in the way we live our lives, based upon the example set for us by Jesus Christ, including our continuing observance of God's laws, His statutes and His judgments—i.e., His Way of Life, is critical as we proclaim this Way to the world (verses 44-47). To not do these things is sure destruction for God's people (verses 48-51).

The Day of Atonement which follows the Feast of Trumpets by nine days pictures the downfall of Satan, that powerful enemy of the people of God and of all of mankind. Christ has, of course, already defeated Satan, but will, on this day, allot to him his just rewards. Once the sins of the world are placed squarely on the head and shoulders of Satan, since he is the deceiver of mankind, then the way is open for the beginning of the millennial reign of Jesus Christ on the earth for one thousand years. This is pictured by the Feast of Tabernacles, which we will be observing just five weeks from now.

As we noted in the opening paragraph of this letter, we look eagerly to the beginning of the Feast this year and all that the Feast signifies for us. Yet there is still much for us to learn in the time between now and Christ's establishment of the Kingdom, especially in applying the things we have learned. So, let's all continue to grow in God's Truth as we enter into this wonderful time of the year which God has made special for all of His people.

In Christian love,



J. Edwin Pope

P.S.—For an in depth study of the events discussed in this letter please review our booklet, "The Great Tribulation and the Day of the Lord." If you have not received a copy of this booklet, please write us for your copy at no charge to you.

Also, please find enclosed our new booklet, "Baptism—a Requirement for Salvation." This booklet is a very meaningful addition to the body of materials available to those desiring an in-depth knowledge of God's Way of Life.

A special member letter with reference to the Feast of Tabernacles will be sent out prior to the Feast.