

CHURCH OF THE  
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*"And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all the nations; and then shall the end come." – Matthew 24:14*

July 14, 2011

Dear Brethren and Friends,

Much has happened on the world scene this year. We have, no doubt, all seen the domino effect in Northern Africa and the Middle East affecting a number of countries, as the fulfilment of prophetic events gathers pace.

In respect of God's Holy Day calendar, we are now in that time between Pentecost and the Feast of Trumpets. We recently celebrated Pentecost on June 12, and the next Holy Day will be on September 29. And what those days picture corresponds with where we are on the world scene. The Holy Spirit was given on that most eventful day of Pentecost in 31 AD, and nearly 2,000 years later we are awaiting the next event—that of the return of Jesus Christ—which the Holy Day of the Feast of Trumpets foreshadows.

Jesus instructed His followers about the importance of watching when He said: "But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that Day come on you unexpectedly. For it will come as a snare on all those who dwell on the face of the whole earth. Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man" (Luke 21:34-36). There is much to learn from these verses. Christ's disciples were told to be watchful and not to let the cares of the world affect them. And in verse 36, those of us who take the Bible seriously, are admonished to pray always to be counted worthy of protection during the time of the Great Tribulation and the Day of the Lord, and to be able to stand spiritually ready before the returning Jesus Christ.

This time of great calamity is spelled out in the book of Daniel: "At that time Michael shall stand up, The great prince who stands watch over the sons of your people; And there shall be a time of trouble, Such as never was since there was a nation, Even to that time. And at that time your people shall be delivered, Every one who is found written in the book" (Daniel 12:1).

Jesus did make this promise to His disciples that there would be a way of escaping this most terrible of times which would precede His return in power and glory. This time of unparalleled trouble is spelled out in Matthew 24:22: "And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved [alive]; but for the elect's sake those days will be shortened."

In the model prayer that Jesus gave to His followers, He exhorted all of us to pray for God's Kingdom to come (Matthew 6:9). But in order for the Kingdom to come, the Great Tribulation and the Day of the Lord must precede that. One cannot happen without the other, as they are inextricably linked.

We may pray regularly "to escape all these things that will come to pass," but do we give a great deal of thought to what will happen to our family, friends and acquaintances during these 3½ years of unprecedented trouble on earth? I have to say that this has exercised my mind a good deal in recent times.

The Kingdom of God will be such a wonderful, joyful and happy place, with Jesus Christ being the perfect ruler, unlike all of those in power today. He will rule in a way that is in the best interests of everyone. He will not reign with some self-serving approach that so many in power have, or develop, when in office.

But what will precede Christ's rule hardly bears thinking about. We can see atrocities being committed now, and we see the brutal way that opposition is put down to preserve the status quo in autocracies and dictatorships. And yet, that will be nothing in comparison with what will happen in the future. Just before Christ's return, we read about such conditions in Luke 21:25-26: "And there will be signs in the sun, in the moon, and in the stars; and on the earth distress of nations, with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring; men's hearts failing them from fear and the expectation of those things which are coming on the earth, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken." The very next verse talks about Christ's return, but before that wonderful event occurs, there will be a catastrophic and chaotic time unlike any other.

The Olivet prophecy in Matthew 24 very clearly tells us of tumultuous events which, surely, cannot be too far ahead of us. But have we really considered what this will mean to those who are close to us, but who have not been called at this time or who may have lost interest, belief in or concern about events which will make life on earth an horrendous time for those not being afforded protection from the horrors that the Bible speaks about.

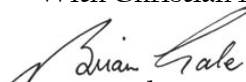
We read in the parable of the five wise and five foolish virgins in Matthew 25:1-13 that there will be those who will be caught unawares. Members of the Church of God who have become lax and lukewarm will not be protected from the horrors to come (see Revelation 3:14-19). If some Church of God members are to go through this time of unprecedented trouble, it seems unlikely that those will be spared (including adult members of our own family) who have shown no interest in the Church, however close they may be to us. It may seem an unpalatable situation on which to meditate, but we do have to be prepared for what could happen in the not-too-distant future. Nevertheless, we know that God does the calling in His own good and perfect way with immaculate timing, and He will bring about situations that will work for the benefit of every last person on earth.

However, please note that the possibility exists that, depending on overall attitude, even some non-converted family members might be given the opportunity for protection during these tumultuous times ahead! 1 Corinthians 7:14 reveals that an unbelieving mate is "sanctified" by the believing mate—and that their minor children are "holy." We also find that non-Israelites (a mixed multitude) were freed from Egyptian slavery, and we read in Genesis 19 that Lot's family members had an opportunity for protection—but, unfortunately, Lot's sons-in-law rejected the opportunity to flee; his wife wanted to return to Sodom, and his daughters subsequently defiled themselves and their father sexually. Nevertheless, we see the importance of faithful members continuing to set an example now for their family and of developing a loving relationship which will sustain all in the times ahead!

It would be unnatural for us not to be concerned, but we have to trust God in this in every way. He knows what is best for us all and when one is to be given his or her best opportunity of making it into His wonderful, eternal and joyful Kingdom.

There are wonderful times ahead, but not before the terrible times which will have been necessitated by man's constant rejection of God's good way. We should be so thankful that we have been called to be in the first (and better) resurrection and to be able to make our "call and election sure" (2 Peter 1:10), so that we can be of service, for eternity, in the perfect Family of God.

With Christian love,

  
Brian Gale  
Great Britain