

The Master's Return and End of the Age

*“As he sat upon the
mount of Olives,
the disciples came
unto him privately,
saying, Tell us,
when shall these
things be? and
what shall be the
sign of thy coming,
and of the end of
the world?”*

—*Matthew 24:3*

ONE OF THE CLOSING

scenes of our Lord's earthly ministry has been recorded in this scripture. Jesus' disciples were asking him about his return, his later ministry and the events that would take place at that future time. They were especially anxious to know what he meant about the destruction of the Temple, and whether

there would be any indication as to when this great event was to take place.—vss. 1,2

LAST MESSAGE TO THE JEWS

In his last public ministry at Jerusalem, Jesus had told the Jews that because of disobedience and lack of appreciation for God's wonderful providence over them as a nation, their house would be

left desolate. “Verily I say unto you, All these things shall come upon this generation. O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate.” (Matt. 23:36-38) He also revealed the fact that he would soon be leaving them, “I say unto you, Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.”—vs. 39

THE FAREWELL ADDRESS

In Jesus’ farewell discourse to his disciples in the upper room, he spoke more specifically about his future return. He said, “Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father’s house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.”—John 14:1-3

Again he said, “Ye have heard how I said unto you, I go away, and come again unto you. If ye loved me, ye would rejoice, because I said, I go unto the Father: for my Father is greater than I. And now I have told you before it come to pass, that, when it is come to pass, ye might believe. Hereafter I will not talk much with you: for the prince of this world [Satan, II Cor. 4:4] cometh, and hath nothing in me. But that the world may know that I love the Father; and as the Father gave me commandment, even so I do. Arise, let us go hence.”—vss. 28-31

FROM THAT TIME FORTH

When the Son of God began his earthly ministry, the Apostle Peter recognized him and understood who he was. At that very time, he started to prepare his disciples with the certain knowledge that his Heavenly Father had sent him into the world for a very special purpose. He explained to them that it was necessary for him to die for the world, and then he would be resurrected and highly exalted. From the scriptural record, we read, “He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.”—Matt. 16:15-17

Then we read, “From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day.”—vs. 21

THE HOLY SPIRIT

The disciples of Jesus were given glimpses of the ultimate purpose of his ministry from time to time, and no doubt they often thought about the kingdom that he had so often spoken of. However, their understanding remained sketchy and very limited until they received the power of the Holy Spirit.

After Jesus died, had been resurrected, and was preparing to ascend into heaven to be reunited with his Heavenly Father, his disciples were not yet clear what was really happening. “When they had come together, they were asking Him, saying, ‘Lord,

is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?’ He said to them, ‘It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority; but you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.’ And after He had said these things, He was lifted up while they were looking on, and a cloud received Him out of their sight.”—Acts 1:6-9, *New American Standard Bible*

When the disciples came to witness this marvelous scene, they were joined by two other men who also came to be with Jesus at this very special time in his earthly ministry. Their glistening white clothing suggests they were angels who had been sent forth by God. The disciples were the only ones who saw Jesus ascend and disappear into the clouds above. The two angels proclaimed that he would return in the same way at the end of this present Gospel Age. Thus we are informed that the manner in which we were to expect our Lord to return would be in an invisible state as a spiritual being.—vss. 10,11

The disciples were only beginning to appreciate the true meaning of the marvelous events that had taken place, but they would understand more clearly when they received the blessed gift of the Holy Spirit of Truth from their loving Heavenly Father. Of that special time and place, we read, “When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a noise like a violent, rushing wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting.

And there appeared to them tongues as of fire distributing themselves, and they rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance.”—Acts 2:1-4, *NASB*

THE ROAD TO EMMAUS

When Jesus was resurrected, he came upon two of his disciples who were making their way toward Emmaus. The three of them then continued together on their journey, the disciples not realizing that their companion was the resurrected Jesus, until they later broke bread together. As they were conversing along the way Cleopas (Luke 24:18) and Peter (vs. 34) spoke about the recent and tragic death of their Master Jesus at the hand of the chief priests and rulers of Israel. Their companion then reminded the two disciples that the Scriptures and prophecies, those of which he himself had perhaps taught them during his ministry, clearly foretold his death. He said, “Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory? And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.”—Luke 24:26,27

THE APOSTLE’S WARNING

During the time that the Master was to be absent, Satan, the Devil, would be allowed to severely test the Lord’s people and draw them away, if it were possible, from the Truth and the wonderful invitation of the heavenly calling. In his letter to the church at Thessalonica, the Apostle Paul warned the brethren to be aware of Satan, and wrote, “Now

we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him, That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand. Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition.”—II Thess. 2:1-3

Even at that time in the history of the Early Church, the apostle could see visible evidences of the impending falling away, when he warned them, “For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way.”—vs. 7

THE DISCIPLES’ QUESTION

When the disciples were inquiring about the time that Jesus would return (Matt. 24:1-3), they did so by using the word [*parousia*, Greek] which really means ‘to be present’ rather than ‘coming’ as the word has been translated in our featured scripture. In addition, they spoke about the end of the world, and used the word [*aion*, Greek] which means ‘age’ instead of world.

Their choice of words was no doubt divinely overruled to reveal much greater meaning and deeper significance, because they pointed forward many centuries to the time of our Lord’s invisible Second Presence. This very special time would also mark one of the closing features of this present Gospel Age during which the heavenly call was to be extended to the faithful followers of Christ. After that calling has been completed he would then establish his kingdom of (Continued on page 35)

(Continued from page 31) righteousness over all the earth.

During the intervening period of time, Jesus ascended to the presence of his Heavenly Father, and there he offered him the merit of his sacrificial life which would first be given on behalf of his true followers. This was explained by the Apostle Paul when he wrote, "Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us."—Heb. 9:24

THE WATCHERS

Jesus' disciples could not have known that his Second Presence was not to occur for another two thousand years, although he had promised to be with them in spirit throughout the long intervening centuries of this present Gospel Age. (Matt. 28:20) However, that great event would mark in a very special way a new era in the spiritual life and experiences of his faithful followers. They would be blessed by greater light and understanding of the Scriptures, and would share in increased activity to spread the unlocked secrets of Truth to those who would have an ear to hear.

At that wonderful juncture of time in the history of the world, only the watchers would recognize the momentous events that would mark the closing years of this Gospel Age. We have Jesus' own recorded words, when he said, "Of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father. Take ye heed, watch and pray: for ye know not when the time is. For the Son of man is as a man taking a far journey, who left his house, and

gave authority to his servants, and to every man his work, and commanded the porter to watch.”—Mark 13:32-34

Jesus’ admonition was that all of his people were to ‘watch,’ but especially those who would be living at the end of the foretold age. “Watch ye therefore: for ye know not when the master of the house cometh, at even, or at midnight, or at the cockcrowing, or in the morning: Lest coming suddenly he find you sleeping. And what I say unto you I say unto all, Watch.”—vss. 35-37

This admonition meant that his followers were to be alert and be ready to recognize the signs of the times. They were encouraged to study the prophetic events that would transpire in the world around them. Again, we read Jesus’ words in Luke’s gospel, “Take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares. For as a snare shall it come on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth. Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man.”—Luke 21:34-36

THE LAODICEAN CHURCH

The message to the Laodicean church was the last of seven messages given to God’s people during this present Gospel Age. It pointed to our Lord Jesus’ return, and to the foretold time that the scriptural treasures were to be unlocked and made known to the ‘watchers.’ The revelator wrote, “Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my

voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.” (Rev. 3:20) This was a very special promise to the consecrated followers of Jesus that the time had arrived for them to receive the riches of hidden Truth that were to be unlocked and revealed to them.

The admonition to the watchers was that they were to have their loins girded about them, and their lights burning. They should also prepare themselves for their Lord’s return so that when he had arrived and knocked, they would open the door to him without any hesitation. A rich blessing would lay in store for his people, because our invisible returned Lord would be present with them and serve them with abundant spiritual food.—Luke 12:35-37

This blessing was the promised ‘meat’ in due season that was to be given to the church, and of which the Prophet Daniel had written many centuries before. “Thou, O Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book, even to the time of the end: many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased.” (Dan. 12:4) Daniel would like to have known the meaning of what he had written, “I heard, but I understood not: then said I, O my Lord, what shall be the end of these things? And he said, Go thy way, Daniel: for the words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end.”—vss. 8,9

UNLOCKED SECRETS

Faithful brethren were on hand at the appointed ‘time of the end’ who were diligent students of the Heavenly Father’s wonderful word of Truth. They were also ready and willing to labor in his vineyard and to share in the sending forth of precious Truths

that had been locked up and kept secret from the worldly-wise for centuries. The message was therefore made known, and sent forth by word of mouth and by the printed page to those who had an ear to hear the words of Truth.

The significance of our Lord Jesus' Second Presence, and other important end-time prophecies began to be studied with greater interest and clarity. There was increased anticipation to the revealed fact that Christ Jesus was to soon set up a glorious kingdom of righteousness and peace over all the earth. Furthermore, those who had faithfully walked in the narrow way of sacrifice would be privileged to share with the Master as members of the Christ in dispensing life-giving blessings to the poor groaning human creation. The watchers realized that the time was drawing near for our Lord Jesus' long foretold kingdom to be established.

RANSOM, RESURRECTION AND RESTITUTION

There was a fresh study of the basic and fundamental doctrines of Truth, with special attention given to the scriptural teachings in connection with the ransom, resurrection and restitution. With the advancing and clearer light of Christ's presence, it was seen that our Lord's ransom sacrifice was given on behalf of the whole world of mankind, and not just for a select few. Consideration was given to Paul's letter to Timothy, where he wrote, "This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus;

Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time.”—I Tim. 2:3-6

A resurrection for all who are in their graves is a major feature of Christ’s glorious future kingdom as he had promised. “Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear shall live. For just as the Father has life in Himself, even so He gave to the Son also to have life in Himself.” (John 5:25-27, *NASB*) This wonderful work will be accomplished under the administration of the Christ. “Do not marvel at this; for an hour is coming, in which all who are in the tombs shall hear His voice, and shall come forth; those who did the good deeds to a resurrection of life, those who committed the evil deeds to a resurrection of judgment.”—vss. 28,29, *NASB*

Restitution blessings will be available to all of the willingly obedient under the righteous rule of Christ’s kingdom. (Acts 3:19-21) This great work is shown under the terms of the Abrahamic Covenant, where it is stated, “That in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies; And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice.”—Gen. 22:17,18

THE SEED OF PROMISE

Jesus was the antitypical seed of promise, as explained by the Apostle Paul in his letter to the brethren at Galatia. “Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to

seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ.” (Gal. 3:16) Those who are being called during this present age of sacrifice and will have proven faithful to their heavenly calling are promised to have a share in the seed of blessing during the time of Christ’s future kingdom. This point was emphasized by Paul, when he said, “If ye be Christ’s, then are ye Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.” (vs. 29) For further clarification, he said, “Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.”—Gal. 4:7

THE SIN OFFERING

Having learned to rightly divide the Word of Truth, the doctrine of the two salvations was seen with greater clarity. The first salvation indicated a spiritual reward for those who would respond to the heavenly calling during this present Gospel Age. The second salvation points to the sin-sick and dying human family who are to be blessed under Christ’s future kingdom of righteousness here on the earth.

In addition, the watchers were enlightened with a clearer understanding of the doctrine of the church’s share in the sin offering. They began to study the Levitical types in more detail, where it is shown that the sacrifice of the bullock represents Jesus (Lev. 16:14), and the goat pictures the church class. (vs. 15) The Apostle Paul’s words in reference to this took on added meaning. Speaking of his own sacrificial life, he pointed out that he was also sharing in the Master’s sufferings. “If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not

moved away from the hope of the gospel, which ye have heard, and which was preached to every creature which is under heaven; whereof I Paul am made a minister; Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the church."—Col. 1:23,24

In this connection, the apostle also explained, "The bodies of those beasts, whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest for sin, are burned without the camp. Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate. Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach."—Heb. 13:11-13

THE COVENANTS

Better understanding concerning the basic doctrines of the covenants was also a special blessing to the watchers. We have noted the wonderful Seed of promise that will ultimately provide rescue for the entire sin-sick and dying human family. (Gen. 22:17,18) God's Law was given to the Israelites through Moses in the inauguration of the Law Covenant at Mount Horeb (Exod. 19:16-19), and it was validated by the blood of bulls and goats. The Apostle Paul confirms this in his letter to the Hebrews.—Heb. 12:18-21

The Prophet Jeremiah (Jer. 31:31-34) foretold God's provision for a New Covenant for the human family, and the Apostle Paul spoke about it in his letter to the Hebrew brethren. (Heb. 8:6-13) The old Law Covenant was merely typical of a new and better covenant arrangement that would be established

and mediated under the administration of Christ's future kingdom. At that time, the Christ will have the authority and power of office to give life to the people who learn obedience. Instead of the blood of typical animals of sacrifice, the New Covenant will have as its foundation the precious and saving blood of our Lord Jesus.

THE COMPLETED CHRIST

For nearly two thousand years the heavenly call has gone out to those Christians who have willingly accepted the invitation. Together with our glorified Lord Jesus they will share in the great work of blessing the human family under the establishment of Christ's future kingdom. The Heavenly Father has set aside a thousand years to provide reconciliation to the human family's obedient, including all who are yet in their graves. When this glorious work has been completed under the mediatorship of Christ's kingdom, all will be delivered back to the Heavenly Father as explained by the Apostle Paul.

"Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death."—I Cor. 15:24-26 ■

"Then judgment shall dwell in the wilderness, and righteousness remain in the fruitful field. And the work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever."—Isaiah 32:16,17