The Manner of Our Lord's Second Advent

"We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts."
—II Peter 1:19

WHEN JESUS WAS ASKED when he would return to set up his kingdom, he told his disciples to watch for signs that were to be given to indicate when that time would occur. These signs that were to accompany his Second Advent would be the only means by which his people would be able to discern this most important event. Therefore, Jesus admonishes us to be alert to the events taking place around us in the world, as well as those things occurring within the church.

This is why our Lord instructed his disciples to watch. "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. 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."—Mark 13:32-37

We are to do this with the view of determining whether or not these events are the ones foretold by Jesus, the apostles, and the prophets that would be evidence that our Lord had returned in preparation for the establishment of his kingdom. The Apostle Peter expresses the thought well when he wrote, "We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts."—II Pet. 1:19

It is important, then, to understand the manner of our Lord's return if the signs which he outlined to his disciples are to have vital meaning to us. If some of the traditions of the past are to be considered there would be no need to watch for his return. The theories of men have devised that this wonderful event would be accompanied by great evidences of supernatural light from the sky, and with trumpets blasting forth. If this were true there would be no need to watch—for those who were not watching would be aware of the fact as soon as those supernatural events took place.

WHAT DO WE WATCH?

This, then, raises the question as to what Jesus meant by watching. What are the Lord's people to watch for? Obviously, they are not to watch the sky. Human vision is limited. If Jesus were to come in the literal manner suggested by the traditions of the past; and if his faithful saints in various parts of the earth were all watching the sky to see him come, the vast majority of them would, of necessity, be sorely disappointed. Only those within a radius of a few square miles at the most would be able to see; while those outside of this small circle—in other parts of the country and the world—would be denied this ecstasy of joy. This is certainly not what Jesus meant!

AN ILLUSTRATION

After telling his disciples that he did not then know the time of his return, that only his Heavenly Father knew, Jesus added, "As the days of Noe were, so shall also the coming [Greek, *parousia*, meaning 'presence'] of the Son of man be. For as in the days [of Noe] that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, And knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming [presence] of the Son of man be."—Matt 24:37-39

The point of this illustration is that the people in general, in Noah's day, did not know the significance of the time in which they were living; did not know until the calamity of the Flood was upon them. Noah knew, however, and his family knew, for they believed what God had told them.

Luke's quotation of this statement by Jesus makes the point even more clear, "As it was in the days of Noe, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man." (Luke 17:26) This reveals clearly that Jesus was not speaking of the time of his arrival, but of his presence. As Noah was present in the 'days of Noe,' so Jesus is present in the 'days of the Son of man.' This, we submit, is a self-evident fact.

This being the case, it brings to light another important truth concerning the Lord's return, which is, that after he comes there would be a time when his own people would know about it and understand its significance, while the vast majority of mankind, just as in the days of Noah, would 'know not.'

AS THE SUN

The manner of Jesus' return and Second Presence is further made plain by him in another illustration. We quote, "If they shall say unto you, Behold, he is in the desert; go not forth: behold, he is in the secret chambers; believe it not. For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming [*parousia*, 'presence'] of the Son of man be."—Matt. 24:26,27

Here we have a number of important points brought to our attention. First, Jesus removed, in the mind of the student of prophecy, the idea that he was to return as a man who could be hidden away in a desert, or in some secret chamber. He wanted his disciples to know that they were not to watch by searching for him as they might look for someone who was lost in the desert, or smuggled away by enemies to some 'secret chambers.'

Since he was not to return as a man to be seen by the natural eye, his presence would be discovered in other ways. To help us grasp this, Jesus gave another illustration. 'As the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming [presence] of the Son of man be.' Here, again, the word *parousia* is used, which means 'presence' rather than 'coming.' Jesus is illustrating the effect of his presence, not the suddenness of his coming, as some have misunderstood this illustration to teach.

The Greek word translated 'lightning' in this text is *astrape*. Its use in the New Testament is very interesting and revealing. It is translated 'lightnings' in Revelation. In each of these instances lightnings are used to symbolize the diffusion of knowledge.

"The temple of God was opened in heaven, and there was seen in his temple the ark of his testament: and there were lightnings, and voices, and thunderings, and an earthquake, and great hail."—Rev. 11:19. See also Rev. 4:5; 8:5; and 16:18

In Luke 11:35,36, this same Greek word is translated "bright shining." The passage reads, "Take heed therefore that the light which is in thee be not darkness. If thy whole body therefore be full of light, having no part dark, the whole shall be full of light, as when the bright shining of a candle doth give thee light." Here the 'bright shining' of a candle is compared with the knowledge of God, the 'light' that fills the hearts of the Lord's people.

When Jesus described his Second Presence, he said it would be as a light, a bright shining [Greek—*Strong's* #796, *astrape*] that would come out of the

east and shine even unto the west. It is only the light of the sun that fits this description. The lesson then, which Jesus conveys by this illustration, is that his return and Second Presence will result in a worldwide dissemination of knowledge, symbolized by light, a light that would eventually dispel all superstition, all satanic darkness, and cause the knowledge of the glory of God to fill the earth "as the waters cover the sea."—Isa. 11:9

In this lesson, Jesus did not use the Greek word for the sun. As the sun rises, there is a brief period of semidarkness, but within minutes after the sun appears above the horizon there is broad daylight; but the enlightenment which comes to the world as a result of the Second Presence of Christ will be more gradually diffused. This light will be as the sun in the sense that the whole world will be enlightened by it, even as the sun shines from east to west; but the work of enlightenment will be gradual, requiring the entire period of Christ's presence and kingdom reign to accomplish it fully.

We have a prophecy of Christ's presence, which further reveals this thought. "It shall come to pass in that day, that the light shall not be clear, nor dark: But it shall be one day which shall be known to the LORD, not day, nor night: but it shall come to pass, that at evening time it shall be light." (Zech. 14:6,7) This is fully in keeping with Jesus' illustration of the effect of his Second Presence. He is that "true Light" which eventually will enlighten "every man that cometh into the world" (John 1:9), but it will require the entire period of his presence and kingdom to accomplish. Thus it will not be accomplished until the close of that day, and the beginning of

the ages of eternity to follow. Then it will be entirely light for the whole world of mankind.

"IN LIKE MANNER"

At the time of Jesus' ascension, when he returned to the heavenly courts, his disciples were somewhat bewildered by what had happened, and an angel appeared to them and said, "Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven." (Acts 1:11) Surely this emphasizes the fact of Jesus' personal return—'This same Jesus . . . shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go.'

During his ministry in the flesh, Jesus said, "Before Abraham was, I am" (John 8:58), meaning that he existed long before Abraham did. As a matter of fact, Jesus, the *Logos*, was the "beginning of the creation of God." (Rev. 3:14) But when he was "made flesh" he continued to be the same personality, the same being. (John 1:14) So when he gave his flesh for the life of the world, and in the resurrection was exalted to the Divine nature, he continued to be the same Jesus, even though exalted to the highest of all planes of life in God's great universe. As promised, this same Jesus was to return, and be present to serve humanity, to uplift and bless the fallen race with health and life.

The angel promised that Jesus would 'so come in like manner' as the disciples had seen him go. And what was that manner? It was quiet and unobserved by the world; the only ones knowing about it being the disciples to whom he had miraculously appeared for the last time. Nor did these actually

see Jesus ascend into heaven, for a cloud received him out of their sight. (Acts 1:9) We have already seen that only the faithful disciples of Jesus were to 'see' him when again he would be present.

For forty days after his resurrection, Jesus was with his disciples, but most of this time he was invisible to them. They were convinced of his resurrection, and of his presence, by "signs," some of which were his appearances in various bodies of flesh. (John 20:30) Now the angel had promised that this same Jesus was to return, and doubtless they realized that when he did return, only those who were watching for the signs would be aware of the great event.

"EVERY EYE"

Revelation 1:7 is another prophecy descriptive of the manner of Christ's return, and of those who will be affected by it. We quote, "Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him." This text has been misused in an attempt to prove the erroneous theory that Jesus will return as a man and be suspended in the sky until every individual throughout the whole earth has an opportunity to see him. But this interpretation of the prophecy is quite out of harmony with the Bible's use of language.

Let us note how the Bible uses the function of the eye to symbolize discernment. After Job's long experience of calamity and trial, he said in prayer to his God. "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee." (Job 42:5) All will concede that Job did not literally see God, for no man can see him and live.—Exod. 33:20

Jesus said to his disciples, "Blessed are your eyes, for they see." (Matt. 13:16) Here, again, the function of the eye is used to symbolize discernment. Still another, and very revealing example of this, is found in the prophecy of Isaiah. This prophecy refers to the Kingdom Age—the time during which 'every eye' will eventually "see" Jesus. It reads, "The LORD hath made bare his holy arm in the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God."—Isa. 52:10

Turning again to the prophecy of Revelation 1:7, we note its statement that Jesus 'cometh with clouds.' These are storm clouds of trouble upon mankind, and it will be these very clouds, together with events following the tribulation which they symbolize, that will reveal to the world the fact that Christ has returned and has taken up his "great power" to reign.—Rev. 11:17,18

That "all the tribes of the earth" (Matt. 24:30) wail, or mourn, because of Christ's return, does not imply that the human race is destroyed. This mourning will be but temporary, and incidental to the overthrow of Satan's world, preparatory to the establishment of Christ's kingdom. With the King present, the kingdom established, and the saints reigning with our glorified Lord, the mourning of the people will be turned to joy. Just as the faithful followers of the Master rejoice as they see the early signs which betoken his return, so mankind, when the progress of events reveal his presence to them, will also rejoice, even though the circumstances through which they see him will, at first, be distressing.

It will be then that both the church and the world will realize that the loving God of heaven has, throughout the ages, been working out his plan for the blessing of his earthly creatures. The long and patient waiting of God's faithful servants for the fulfillment of his promise will be at an end. They will then know that every detail of the Divine plan has been accomplished exactly as God designed, and exactly in his due time.

Then the "perfect day" will have arrived, and the "shining light" of Divine Truth, which has illumi-nated the "just" ones throughout the time when "darkness" has covered the earth, and "gross dark-ness the people," sufficiently to guide them in their service and assure them of God's love, will have scattered all the darkness. (Prov. 4:18; Isa. 60:2) Then, not only will those who have served God in the past without a full knowledge of his purposes, know him and understand his ways as they pertain to mankind, but all mankind will have an opportu-nity to know him; for the knowledge of the LORD will then fill the earth. (Isa. 11:9; Hab. 2:14) May we continue to look and pray for that 'perfect day.' ■