

The _____ Christadelphian Advocate

FEBRUARY 2011

SPECIAL



ISSUE

Lift Up Your Heads

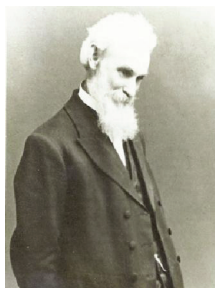
Introduction – “Lift Up Your Heads”	31
Prophecy – Is The End Near?	33
Prophecy – Prophetic Times: The 7000 Year Plan	39
Prophecy – “A Time of Trouble”	43
Exhortation – “Shall He Find Faith?”	47
Exposition – “The Fig Tree And All The Trees”	50
Exposition – “This Generation”	54
Exhortation – “Watch and Pray”	57
Exhortation – “Accounted Worthy To Attain That World”	60
God’s 7000 Year Plan	BC

A monthly magazine in defense of the “Things Concerning the Kingdom of God and the Name of Jesus Christ” as embraced in The Hope of Israel with a view to “Taking Out A People For Yahweh’s Name”

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We have seen that the Scriptures teach the fall of man and his kingdom and the consequent evils universal in the earth. The testimonies cited glowingly promise redemption and restitution... By what means does God's revealed plan provide for the great and universal remedy promised? ... The world's salvation is not to be found in man, but it must proceed from God; righteous laws and wise government must come from heaven, the source of all wisdom and goodness. It is no vain speculation to say that

such a grand state of things awaits this burdened world of ours, and that it will be realized in the establishment of the kingdom of God universally in all the earth. ...When this kingdom of God sweeps from the face of the earth the wickedness of man and fills the earth to its utmost bounds with the glory of the Lord, **the world's redemption will be a grand and glorious reality.**

Thomas Williams, *The World's Redemption*, Chapter 3

The Christadelphian Advocate

He that hath my word, let him speak my word faithfully.

Jeremiah 23:28

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NUMBER 2

Introduction

“Then Look Up, and Lift Up Your Heads; For Your Redemption Draweth Nigh”

This Special Issue focuses on the Lord’s words as recorded by Luke in chapter 21:24-36. In Luke’s account of the Olivet prophecy, we find many of the signs of the Lord’s second coming leading up to the fulfillment of our hope. Our Lord urged his latter day servants, at such time as they saw “these things (of which he had told them) **begin** to come to pass, *then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh* (verse 28). In this issue, we will examine reasons for concluding that this is that time – this is the day of salvation. Every passing day is filled with events that fortify our hope that our Lord is near, even at the door.

In spite of all this evidence, there is also increasing potential for distraction from the reality of our redemption drawing nigh. Has the Lord delayed his coming? Fifteen years have come and gone since the approach of the turn of the century that many had expected as the end of the 6000 year period of labor and the beginning of the 1000 year millennial “rest for the people of God.” Actually, based upon Israel’s appearance among the nations in May 1948, sincere brethren have looked to even earlier dates in the late 20th century in anticipation of our Lord’s return. Were it not for the wondrous signs that we have now been blessed to witness, reaching the year 2011 might well be perceived by some as a delay in the Lord’s return.

In the epistle to the Hebrews, the writer exhorts us: *Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompence of reward. For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise. For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry. Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him. But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul* (Hebrews 10:35-39). In encouraging us not to draw back from our faith, the writer cites Habakkuk 2:3-4 in which the prophet declared that the vision is yet for an appointed time and though it tarry, wait for it. We are living in that stretch of time when it might be perceived to tarry, but the message is clear: have confidence in its certainty and **wait for it**, the coming of the Lord.

In addition to what some may consider the “lateness” of this date is the fact

that we are now living in “perilous times” and a “time of trouble” both for the world and for our community; we are living in days like the days of Noah and Lot, in a time when the Lord had prophetically enquired: *Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?* (Luke 18:8) Peter had also prophesied saying: *there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, And saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation* (2 Peter 3:3-4). Truly we all know some who have left the faith, some distracted by worldly pursuits and others still attending Christadelphian meetings but seemingly marking their time while real enthusiasm for service in the vineyard has greatly diminished. There are people who would love to share the hope that we have been given: *the harvest truly is great, but the labourers are few* (Luke 10:2).

In our theme verses from Luke 21, the Master spoke **words of encouragement and words of warning**. He warned his servants not to be distracted from seeking first the kingdom of God and His righteousness: *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.... 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 21:32-36).

His encouragement was expressed throughout this prophecy. When we are surrounded by *Men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth*, we should remember his promise – *and then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory*. When the powers of heaven are being shaken he encouraged his servants to *lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh*. When we bear witness to the *fig tree and all of the trees* having shot forth we know *that the kingdom of God is nigh at hand*. *Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass away, till all be fulfilled* (Luke 21:26-32).

It is our hope that all serious Bible students will appreciate the reality that **we are the generation witnessing these signs**; we are living in that day when we have every reason to take heed to ourselves. Will we be among those *faithful and wise servant(s), whom his lord hath made ruler over his household, to give them meat in due season? Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing* (Matthew 24: 45-46). Let us examine ourselves, not forgetting what manner of men we are so that we might in spirit and truth lift up our heads. These are the last days, the Master is at the door and *This generation shall not pass away till all be fulfilled*.

Is The End Near?

Many of us who were active in the Christadelphian community thirty years ago remember the sense of urgency with which our expectations for the future were held. We were convinced that within a few short years, our Lord would return to the earth and establish his Kingdom. Few expected we would be seeing the kingdoms of men continuing to hold sway over the earth this far into the twenty-first century.

While acknowledging that expectations were not met in the time-frame that many of us expected, it is possible to dwell overmuch on this disappointment and overlook the underlying progress of events. The purpose of this article is to appeal for a sense of perspective, especially among those who may be disillusioned on account of expectations that were not met time-wise, by looking at those developments which testify to the certainty of the things which we look for coming to pass in the earth.

It is recorded in the Scriptures that saints asked how long it would be until the end of the time God allotted to the kingdoms of men. Two of these questions are recorded in the prophecy of Daniel:

The first “how long” question: *Then I heard one saint speaking, and another saint said unto that certain saint which spake, **How long** shall be the vision concerning the daily sacrifice, and the transgression of desolation, to give both the sanctuary and the host to be trodden under foot?* (Daniel 8:13)

The second “how long” question: *Then I Daniel looked, and, behold, there stood other two, the one on this side of the bank of the river, and the other on that side of the bank of the river. And one said to the man clothed in linen, which was upon the waters of the river, **How long** shall it be to the end of these wonders?* (Daniel 12:5-6). In the context in which this question was asked, “these wonders” included the resurrection of the dead (Daniel 12:2).

The fact that these “how long” questions are asked and answered shows that God’s plan has time spans allotted for the accomplishment of His purpose. When the apostle Peter described “those things which angels desire to look into,” he referenced diligent searching by the prophets: *Of which salvation the prophets have enquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you: Searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow* (1 Peter 1:10-11). There are two distinct things that were searched out. The first was (1) “**what things**” and the second was (2) “**what manner of time**” was signified in relation to both the sufferings of Christ at his first coming and the

glory should that follow at his second coming. Our purpose in this writing is to consider *what things* in relation to the “how long” questions cited on p. 33 rather than what *manner of time*. There were specific end-post markers given as signs that enable us to determine that we live close to the end.



Aerial View of Temple Mount: The Al Aqsa Mosque is to the left, the Dome of Rock in the centre, and the Marawani Mosque where the “A” appears, under the plaza commonly known as Solomon’s Stables. The entrance to this mosque is indicated by the “B” and debris dump piled up when excavations took place in 2000-2001 by the “C”. The unwillingness of the government of Israel to intervene over the expansion of this third mosque indicates that Temple Mount continues to be trodden down in measure by the Gentiles.

The first question has specific reference to things concerning Jerusalem as it was the site of the Temple sanctuary where the daily sacrifice was offered. The reference to the host being “trodden under foot” establishes a direct link to the Olivet prophecy where our Lord also spoke about the end of the treading down of Jerusalem: *And they [the Jewish inhabitants of the Roman province of Judea including Jerusalem] shall fall by the edge*

of the sword, and shall be led away captive into all nations: and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled (Luke 21:24). Change in the circumstances of Jerusalem was given as one great sign: the treading down of the city by Gentile powers would come to an end when the times of the Gentiles were fulfilled. Although the capacity of the Gentiles to tread down Jerusalem was reduced when Israel captured the eastern sector and reunited the entire city in 1967, the central core of the city still remains in the hands of the Gentiles and under their de facto control. At the direction of Moshe Dayan, Israel’s Minister of Defense in 1967, the Wakf, the Islamic trust, was given the keys to Temple Mount and allowed to retain symbolic control over the Al Aqsa mosque and Dome of the Rock shrine situated there. In the ninth of Daniel, the prophet is clear that the final end will not come until that Islamic domination of the core of the city ceases: *and on the temple shall be the abomination of desolations; and at the end of the time an end shall be put to the desolation* (Daniel 9:27, Septuagint). Prophetically, these Islamic monuments are referred to as “the

abomination of desolations.” Their identity is clearly established by their location – on the site of the temple.

Under what circumstance the “abomination of desolations” in the heart of Jerusalem is brought to an end is not revealed in the Scriptures. There are hints that it is accomplished deliberately by human agency rather than as a result of a natural disaster like an earthquake (Deuteronomy 33:29; Ezekiel 11:18). Based on the “how long” question asked in Daniel 8 and the answer given there and in Daniel 9, we can state with confidence that the things concerning Jerusalem in general and the future of Temple Mount in particular are closely connected to events in the earth at the coming of the Lord. At this time in history, the destiny of Jerusalem continues to be a significant source of global controversy. Many nations are disposed to having the eastern sector of the city, now under Israeli sovereignty, as the capital of a Palestinian state. Most recently five Latin American countries – Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia, Uruguay and Ecuador – have indicated that if such an outcome cannot be negotiated by the Palestinians with Israel, they will support the unilateral declaration of Palestinian statehood, a step that would directly challenge Israel’s claim to Jerusalem and the West Bank. Four of these five countries were among the thirty-three nations that comprised the majority vote for the UN Partition Plan in 1947 which enabled the declaration of Israel’s independence the following year (the fifth, Argentina, abstained). Thus, the issue of Israeli versus Palestinian versus international control over the holy places in Jerusalem is destined to be a major issue on the agenda of the world in the time ahead.

Another end-time marker is given in the answer to the second “how long” question. In the Septuagint translation, the answer includes the statement “when the dispersion [of the Jewish people] is ended they shall know all these things.” The meaning of this testimony is that there will come a point in time when the scattering of the Jewish people will have run its course. How will this time be discernible? It will be known when the Jewish people have been restored as a nation to their own land. While there is still a sizable Diaspora global community of Jews, the number of Jews living in Israel now exceeds 5,726,000 and is closing in on representing the majority of the total world Jewish population. The majority of Jewish children in the world already live in Israel. Thus, the timing of the resurrec-

The only Jewish community in the world that is growing is Israel, which is home to most of the world’s Jewish children under the age of 15.

Source: <http://www.simpletoremember.com/articles/a/jewpopdrops/>



**220 Jews from Paris
emigrating to Israel in 2006**

tion of the dead is associated with the restoration of Israel as a nation (Romans 11:15).

Among many global circumstances that have changed over the past thirty years, there is one that particularly stands out: the antagonism of many peoples of the earth towards Israel is much more pronounced. The intelligentsia of the western world, represented by media, governments and movements on many university cam-

pus, unite in their vociferous condemnation of the actions of Israel. Two books read by this writer, published this year, document the extent to which this great shift in the rise of anti-Israel prejudice has occurred, particularly in Europe: (1) *The Lethal Obsession* by Professor Robert Wistrich, Professor of modern European history at Hebrew University of Jerusalem and head of its Vidal Sassoon International Center for the Study of Antisemitism and (2) *The World Turned Upside Down* by Melanie Phillips, an award-winning journalist in the UK. One of the paradoxes which the latter book seeks to explain is how Muslims holding radical Islamic “jihad” ideology make for strange bedfellows with liberal humanists who reject the God of the Bible. The author makes a strong case for her conclusion:

What (western progressives and Islamists) also have in common is hostility to Judaism, Israel and the Jewish people. The genocidal hatred of Israel and the Jews that drives the Islamic jihad against the West is not acknowledged or countered by the West because its most high-minded citizens share at least some of that prejudice. Both Western liberals and Islamists believe in utopias to which the Jews are an obstacle. Israel is an obstacle to both the rule of Islam over the earth and a world where there are no divisions based on religion or creed...Both the liberal utopias of a world without prejudice, divisions or war and the Islamist utopia of a world without unbelievers are universalist ideologies. The people who are always in the way of universalizing utopias are the Jews. [Melanie Phillips, *The World Turned Upside Down*, (New York, 2010), p. 406-407].

What Melanie Phillips is saying is that what unites western liberal thinkers and Islamists in their mutual hatred of Israel is their sense that Israel blocks the attainment of the alternative visions for the world to which they aspire. The rise of this hateful and irrational global opposition to Israel’s very existence was a necessary development before the Lord’s second coming.

At his son’s birth, Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist, prophesied about the work of the coming Messiah of Israel:



Simultaneous demonstrations against Israel occur in major cities of the world on six continents when Israel defends itself

And his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Spirit, and prophesied, saying, Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for he hath visited and redeemed his people, And hath raised up an horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David; As he spake by the mouth of his holy prophets, which have been since the world began: That we should be saved from our enemies, and from the hand

of all that hate us; To perform the mercy promised to our fathers, and to remember his holy covenant; The oath which he sware to our father Abraham, That he would grant unto us, that we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies might serve him without fear, In holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life (Luke 1:67-75).

After noting that he was speaking of things that were the burden of God's holy prophets since the beginning of the world, Zacharias prophesied about Messiah's work in saving his people "from our enemies and from the hand of all that hate us." He then repeats again that Messiah would deliver Israel "out of the hand of our enemies." This prophecy was not fulfilled at the first coming of the Lord. Therefore, it remains to be fulfilled at his second coming. In order for this prophecy to be fulfilled, it is necessary that Israel be in desperate need of deliverance and salvation from the hand of enemies that hate them. It is strongly implied that there is no other source of deliverance and salvation in the earth available to Israel when Messiah comes to his people (Isaiah 63:5).

The past decade has seen a new alignment of formidable enemies that hate Israel. Iran has pledged itself to the annihilation of Israel and is suspected of working on a nuclear weapons program and ballistic missile delivery system to be able to destroy Israel. **Israel is the only UN member state that is threatened with annihilation by another member state.** Turkey has shifted from being a cooperative ally to a bellicose adversary. Even those Arab countries with which Israel is of-





Identifying Israel with Nazism is common among those who vent their hatred of Israel

The Star of David on Israel's flag has been replaced by these protesters with the Nazi swastika

officially at peace are uncertain friends: in late 2010, Jordan is accepting overtures from Iran and Egypt is publicly accusing the Mossad of spying against Egypt's interests. The United States has taken a much more equivocal position as the President reaches out to the Muslim world and seeks better relations with its member nations. Hostility

towards Israel breaks out in open expression of hatred particularly when Israel takes measures to defend itself. It is this hatred towards Israel, in which the nation is the object of protests and denunciation in cities across the world, that provides compelling evidence for our conviction that the coming of the Messiah of Israel is drawing close. If Melanie Phillips is correct in her assessment, there is no reason to expect that the wave of hatred directed against Israel will turn back: it can only intensify in the time ahead.

It is possible to view the ebb and flow of events concerning Israel and Jerusalem with a certain amount of skepticism arising out of the seemingly endless pattern of futile negotiations between the Palestinian Authority and the government of Israel: "Oh, here we go again." The familiarity and persistence of these things may have contributed to their losing their impact as a witness. Nevertheless, it is impossible to escape the conclusion that at a future point, there will be a resolution: things are moving forward on a collision course. There are political and military forces gaining ascendancy in the world that are committed to at least bringing about Israel's withdrawal from the West Bank and the eastern sector of Jerusalem, if not Israel's dismantling altogether as a Jewish state. Because our Lord referred to his coming as a snare to all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth (Luke 21:35), it is unlikely that coming divine intervention to bring permanent resolution will break upon the world with any significant prior warning. There will be no time then to put our houses in order. God has provided abundant witness to this generation of what He intends to accomplish in the earth. It is our choice now whether to believe and prepare for it or not.

James Farrar, Grimsby, ON

Prophetic Times: The 7000 Year Plan

There has been a plan from the beginning: Yahweh has had a plan for this earth from the beginning, even before the creative work began. The Almighty's plan has a definite purpose and is being worked out according to a precise timetable. It is certain and should be an anchor of our faith. The vision of His plan is painted throughout the pages of Scripture and it is a beautiful picture that begins in Genesis where we read that on the fourth day, *God said, Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven...and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days and years...God made two great lights; the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night.* So it is, we have these wonderful and faithful arrangements of Yahweh. The two natural signs of the sun and moon are still with us today and give order and predictability to our lives.

The importance of the weekly time cycle and the 7th day of rest: In addition to days and years, the creation account reveals that an additional time cycle was established – the seven day or weekly cycle. After the six literal days of creative work, we are told that God blessed and sanctified the seventh day *because that in it he had rested from all his work which God created and made* (Genesis 2:2-3). Yahweh thereby demonstrated the importance of the weekly time cycle and declared the seventh day as a day of rest.

However, it is important to note that there is something unique about this seven day cycle – that is, there is no natural sign in the heavens that marks it out like the daily and yearly cycles. Is it not, therefore, a spiritual sign designed to teach man that God has pre-ordained a period of time for this creation, which will culminate in a period of “rest”? **Just as there were six days of creative work followed by a seventh day of rest, so the Scriptures teach that there will be six “days” of this creation’s existence followed also by a seventh “day of rest.”** This is exactly what is revealed in Hebrews chapter 4 where the critical connecting link is made back to Genesis: *For he spake in a certain place of the seventh day on this wise, And God did rest on the seventh day from all his works...There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God. For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his* (Hebrews 4:4, 9-10).

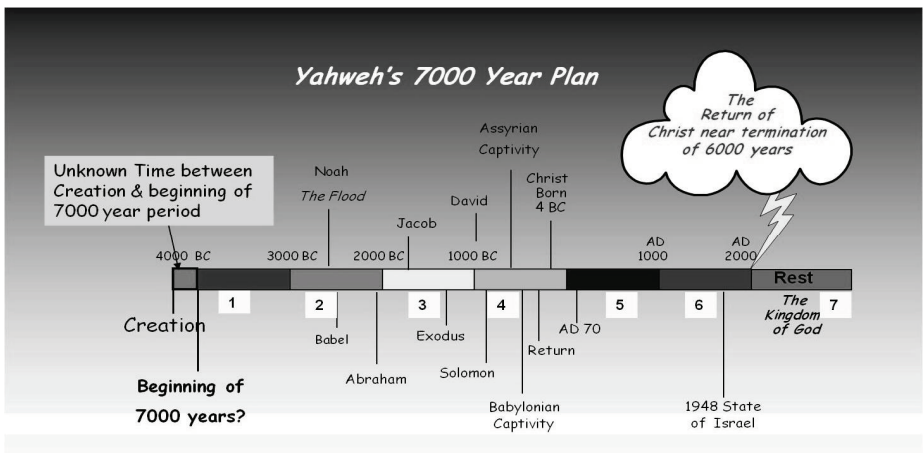
The literal six days of Creation then form a microcosm of the overall plan of God with His revealed purpose revolving around a pre-determined plan known and communicated from the beginning. The seven-day weekly cycle then represents a Divine purpose, a Divine promise, and a Divine prophecy.

The “day as a 1000 years” concept is the key to our understanding of the overall duration of the anti-typical time periods and the parable of

Creation. It is revealed by the Apostle Peter in 2 Peter 3:8-9: *But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.*

The antitype of the six days of creation followed by a day of rest is then a period of 6000 years of labor and oppression under the kingdoms of men and subjection to the curse pronounced in the Garden of Eden. The 6000 years will be followed by a special 1000-year period of blessing, redemption and true rest. The millennium age or future “day of rest” for Yahweh’s people is the time period when the Kingdom of God will be established and His elect will reign with His Son as revealed in the Apocalypse – *they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years* (Revelation 20:6).

Yahweh's 7000 Year Plan: The total period of 7000 years then comprises the plan of God as revealed to man. It is based on the natural weekly time period as mentioned, along with the seventh day or Sabbath rest. And so, Yahweh’s plan of salvation has been unfolding precisely according to His timetable. Many prophecies of old have been fulfilled; most notably, the first advent of the Messiah. Other specific milestones have been declared through the words of the prophets. Time periods revealed principally unto Daniel and the Apostle John have proven to be an accurate basis for predicting interim dates of the rise and fall of world empires. The prediction of end-dates and particularly the time of our Lord’s return have invigorated the searching minds of prophecy students for many years. Yet, the fact is that Christ himself declared that *of that day and hour, knoweth no man* (Matthew 24:36).



So, where does that leave us today in the year A.D. 2011? By most calculations and calendars of man's creation, the 6000 years or period of labor has passed. For some, there is perhaps a reluctance even to speak of God's 7000 year plan, or to do so only apologetically. Eagerly anticipated "prophetic" time period end-dates that many hoped would bring our Master's return (e.g., 1917, 1972, 1988, 1992 and 1996) have come and gone. And now, time has marched eleven years past the dawning of the seventh millennia according to our modern calendars.

Uncertainties in man's calculation of time and calendars: Bible students generally rely upon Bishop Usher's calculations for the period of time from the creation to Christ. Circa 1650, he arrived at a date for the beginning of Creation using Old Testament chronology and other evidence, which was 4004 B.C. Based on Usher's calculations, the 6000 years would have culminated somewhere around 1997 or 1998, depending upon how the transition between BC and AD is dealt with. While Usher's work represented a worthy effort, it has limitations with respect to being used to calculate either the starting or end date of the 6000-year period. Even if his calculations were accurate, does the 6000-year period begin with the birth of Adam, or with his fall, or with some other period in his life? There are also challenges in the use of Old Testament chronology for establishing extended dating periods. One is the issue of overlapping periods of rulership, with a king and his successor and with the judges of Israel and the Philistines. Further, there is uncertainty as to whether Terah was 131 years of age, or 75 years of age, when Abraham was born.

Also, can we rely on the calendars of man's creation? The Gregorian calendar in use today was established in 1582 and replaced the Julian calendar first set up in 45 B.C. The Gregorian calendar is solar-based while the Jewish calendar is lunar-based. The dating from the beginning of the Christian era is generally considered reasonably accurate (although most scholars would date the birth of the Christ to be 4 B.C and not A.D. 0).

Yahweh's accounting of time is certain: For the children of faith, what is of most vital importance is the acknowledgement of God's prerogative with respect to the recognition of time. Yahweh is the supreme authority in terms of the fulfillment of prophetic times and the accounting of the years comprising the six "day" or 6000 year existence of His creation. In fact, there may be times He chooses to discount altogether. For example, in the genealogy of the Christ given in Matthew 1 (through the royal line of the kings in the line of Joseph), we find that four rulers of Judah, representing a total of 75 years, are omitted. They are also not counted in the total "generations" of Matthew's account of Christ's lineage. There may be other such times that are not counted according to Yahweh's reckoning.

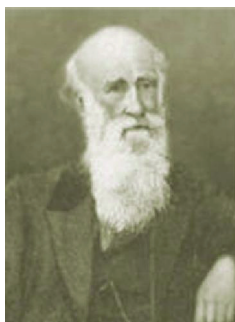
Finally, we ask – what is the termination point of the 6000-year period when that wonderful day of "rest" begins? Does it end with the return of Christ, or some later period after the judgment process and the subduing of the nations? If man were able to calculate the elapsed time and predict the exact timing of these events, Jesus would not have said, *It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father has put in his own power* (Acts 1:7).

The fulfillment of the 7000-Year Plan is also certain: There are more than enough signs for us to know that we are living in the closing days of the 6000 year period, and that the return of the Lord Jesus Christ is imminent. Certainly, the return of the Jews to a re-born Nation of Israel is the greatest among the signs witnessed in these Gentile times in which we live.

The day of rest and concept of the Sabbath has been and will be a great blessing for man and for all of God's creation, for which we should be very thankful. How much more thankful should we be for His provision for, and promise of, a greater "seventh day of rest"? *Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest.* The day of rest is surely near.

For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry (Habakkuk 2:3).

Ken Wood, Brattleboro, VT



Thus a population will have been provided for the earth, which, instead of being destroyed, will be renovated, and all things belonging to it made new. The earth with its inhabitants will be incorruptible, undefiled and unfading. God, according to His word, will have made "a full end of all nations" except that of Israel; which will be the sole occupant of the globe, and every Israelite "an Israelite indeed," "equal to the Elohim," and crowned with glory and honour throughout all ages. During the thousand years the nation will consist of three classes, Christ and the saints, righteous Israelites in the flesh and those who die "accursed;" but when perfection comes there will be but one class, and all will be immortal. The purpose of God, in the formation of the earth, will be accomplished; and "the headstone of the creation will be brought forth with shoutings, crying Grace, grace unto it."

John Thomas, *Elpis Israel*, Part III, Chapter 6, "The End"

“A Time Of Trouble”

And at that time shall Michael stand up, the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people: and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time: and at that time thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book (Daniel 12:1).

All forms of government, from democracies to dictatorships, fear civil unrest. Civil unrest may lead to violent demonstrations, and even toppling of the government and anarchy. The nations are on a course which could lead to frightening civil unrest within the next decade or two – even apart from God’s upcoming judgment of the nations at Jerusalem. We will attempt here to describe some of the disturbing features of this present *time of trouble*.

Energy – Currently eighty-three percent of the world’s total energy needs are met by oil (33%), coal (27%) or natural gas (23%). Another nine percent are met with nuclear (6%) or hydro power (3%). Additional nuclear and natural gas power plants are either under construction or planned, but they will make little impact on the need for additional oil and coal supplies. Virtually all of the major rivers in the world are dammed, so few new dams can be constructed without more harm than benefit.

Although some new oil fields, particularly in central Asia and Africa, are adding to global oil production, production is in decline from some major long operating fields in Mexico, the North Sea (England and Norway), and in inland United States including Alaska. Also, some major oil companies are focusing more on developing natural gas fields, because new oil fields are increasingly expensive to develop and are often located in hostile countries.

The time is coming when the global demand for oil will exceed the production capacity of the developed oil fields for an extended time. When that occurs, the price of crude oil and oil based products will rise sharply in a brief period. Estimates for that “peak oil” date currently range from 2012 to 2020. In the next decade, economic growth in the BRIC (Brazil, Russia, India, China) countries is expected to be stronger than the economic growth in the developed countries. Any parallel economic growth in the developed countries will likely push the “peak oil” date closer in time.

Food – The world’s population is approximately 6.5 billion people with an annual growth rate of 1.14% (74,000,000 people). The extra food needed for a growing population must either come from increased yields, increased planted acreage, or both. Almost all of the arable land available for food production is being farmed. In addition, biofuels are competing with the

food supply, and overworked soils are degrading and eroding.

In the 1960's the LORD allowed scientists to substantially increase crop yields. Global grain production grew by sixty-four percent in 1970-1990, but only by twenty-four percent in 1990-2009. No substantial yield increases are expected in the coming years. Additional acreage is being planted in some countries but usually with the penalty of deforestation.

Forty percent of global crop production is from irrigated land. However, groundwater depletion has been severe in some major agricultural areas, including northeast India, northeast China, northeast Pakistan, California's Central Valley, and the plains states of the United States. In 2000, global groundwater depletion was about 75 trillion gallons (1/80 of the volume of water in the Great Lakes). Many countries may experience reduced crop production in the future because of groundwater depletion unless they are able to irrigate more efficiently.

An important statistic is the days of grain supplies remaining at the beginning of the next year's harvest. Because of a poor wheat harvest in Russia and a reduced corn harvest in the United States, the remaining grain supply for the 2010-11 agricultural year is projected to be 72 days. A 64-day remaining grain supply in the 2007-08 agricultural year set off food riots in some countries dependent on agricultural imports. As the world population grows, every poor harvest in a major agricultural area will further strain the global grain supply.

Fish supply about five percent of the world's protein consumption. More sophisticated technologies for locating schools of fish and for netting fish have resulted in greater catches. All of the sections of the oceans viable for commercial fishing are being fished. Most coastal fish habitats are over-fished. Without better management of the global fish habitats, the annual fish catch will decrease, even as the global population increases.

Honeybees – The plants that honeybees pollinate comprise about twenty-three percent of all U. S. agricultural production, and include alfalfa hay, apples, oranges, broccoli, cantaloupe/honeydew, nuts, and other fruits and vegetables.

Since 2006, the honeybee population in the United States has declined by thirty percent due to four successive years of a phenomenon called "colony collapse disorder." The primary symptom of this disorder is bees not returning to their hives when they leave, usually in the winter. Many possible causes for the disorder have been suggested. One group of scientists believes that they have traced the disorder to a mite and have been able to find a cure for it. The next few years will be critical in averting a potential agricultural disaster.

The China Impact – With the world's second largest economy, an economic growth rate close to ten percent and twenty percent of the world's population (1.3 billion persons), China's impact on the global scene, both financial and otherwise, is enormous.

An imminent threat to China's roaring economy is that sixty percent of its activity is related to building construction. The building industry has never before constituted more than thirty percent of a country's economy. Once China's building needs have largely been met, its economy will severely contract unless another economic driver arises to take its place. The impact to the global economy of a severe contraction of China's economy will probably be immediate and painful.

China's economy also faces another menacing threat – a critical shortage of water where it is most needed in the North China Plain. The North China Plain is home to forty percent of China's population and fifty percent of its arable land, but only eight percent of its water supply. Annual rainfall in the North China Plain is less than 18 inches, and less than 12 inches in most of it. However, the region produces more than fifty percent of China's wheat, and thirty three percent of its corn. Two-thirds of the region's grain output is from irrigated land. The southern half of China, with far more rainfall, is too hilly for extensive agricultural production.

A phenomenal rise in migration to the cities and industrialization has resulted in overtaxed water supplies throughout China, but particularly in the North China Plain. The groundwater table is dropping at a rate of 4.5 feet/year throughout most of the region and at a rate of 10 feet/year in at least one area.

An ambitious effort to transfer 36 billion gallons/day (36 Bgpd) from the Yangtze River in south China to China's capital city, Beijing, and other parts of the North China Plain has encountered major setbacks. The project, called the South-North Diversion Project, was to consist of three legs – Eastern (11 Bgpd), Central (10 Bgpd) and Western (15 Bgpd). The Eastern leg and the Central leg are currently under construction. However, the water supply for the Eastern leg, the mouth of the Yangtze River in eastern China, is contaminated with toxic industrial wastes. It is considered prohibitively expensive to treat to potable water quality and may not even be treatable to agricultural water quality. The Central leg should be beneficial when completed but will cause extensive damage to the Han River ecosystem because it will divert almost forty percent of the Han River toward Beijing. The Western leg, which would convey water from an upstream (cleaner) section of the Yangtze River to the Yellow River for withdrawals for various uses, will not be constructed. In 2008, an earthquake occurred along one of the five earthquake fault lines that the water channel would have crossed in

western Sichuan. That fault line was the site of 18 destructive earthquakes between 1901 and 1976.

The North China Plain's water supply problems will primarily affect the rest of the globe by its impact on the global food supply. China currently produces about 20% of the global grain supply. It has striven mightily in recent years to be self-sufficient in supplying its grain needs and has been largely successful. It is now purchasing small amounts of grain as needed to keep a 100-150 day supply, in order to prevent sharp domestic price hikes. With continued loss of agricultural land to urbanization and continued depletion of the groundwater table, China will be unable to remain self-sufficient in grain production. Any increase in China's imports will likely decrease the global supply of grain and increase its price.

Final Thoughts: There are many other potential threats to global stability, such as national and personal debt, terrorism and war, competition for energy and natural resources and the *wickedness of man great in the earth*. As in the days of Noah, it appears that man will pay a steep price for filling the earth with violence and corruption. *Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness* (2 Peter 3:11).

Randy Morrisette, Richmond, Virginia



A statement in Daniel (12:4) seems to indicate that it is in our own times more particularly that the prophetic visions are to be understood, both as regards their events and times; *But thou, O Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book even to the time of the end ...* There is a reason why “the words” may be understood at the time of the end. In the words are prophetically delineated historical events extending over centuries, and at the time of the end, we have the facts of accomplished history as the infallible interpreters of these words.

Robert Roberts, *Christendom Astray*, Lecture 16 – Times and Signs

“Shall He Find Faith?”

And 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 (Luke 21:34). Jesus exhorts believers living in the final generation prior to his return to *take heed* concerning the distractions that will be prevalent in these perilous times. His words are consistent with many of the other prophecies that he and others spoke concerning the conditions in the latter days and the impact of those conditions on the servants of God. Perhaps the most significant prophecy of the Master concerning these days is found in Luke 18:1-8, words that conclude with the well known question: *Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?*

Much has been written on this question and the proper interpretation of the word *faith*. Some prefer to place the focus on *the faith* suggesting that the proper understanding of Bible truth will be lacking in the final generation. Others feel that believers in the last days will have *little faith* and that serious doubts would undermine their commitment to *the faith*. The fact is that both truth and commitment are fundamental to any real faith. It is *the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen*.

The context in Luke 18 is a parable to teach *that men ought always to pray, and not to faint*. To faint would be to become weak or weary, to lose our zeal. The parable offers the example of the poor widow, who never gave up; she actually made the unjust judge weary by her continual crying for vengeance. Based on her determination, she was avenged of her adversary and the lesson was then drawn: *shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them?* In answer to this question the implication of the next question (shall he find faith?) would lead us to believe that in the last days few would actually be determined and consistently crying day and night for the judgments that will be administered at the Lord's return.

What else do we know about conditions in the last days? We know that it will be like the days of Noah and Lot (see Luke 17:26-30). In the days of Noah, the *wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence. In Lot's day the men of Sodom were wicked and sinners before the LORD exceedingly.* Such are the conditions in the world in this final generation: how does this great wickedness affect the faith of the servants of God?

In the days of Noah and Lot, the sons of God were *eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage*, buying, selling, planting, building; all

busily engaged in the cares and pleasures of this life and so the judgments came on them unawares. *Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of man is revealed.* Are many of the sons of God distracted by the cares of this life; are there only a few like Noah and Lot who will be accounted worthy to escape?

We know also that in the last days there will be *a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time* (Daniel 12:1). *This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, Without natural affection, truce-breakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, Traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God* (2 Timothy 3:1-4). Although such words are descriptive of the world at large, are many of the believers now *lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God*?

Peter speaks about the last days saying *that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, And saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation* (2 Peter 3:3-4). How many today are familiar with *the fathers* and how many today understand that they are *asleep*? It is not reasonable to conclude that these scoffers are former believers questioning their faith?

There are other prophetic implications that suggest that the final generation of believers is sadly lacking in their faith and that their conduct is no longer that of wise and faithful servants. Jesus warned of this saying: *But and if that evil servant shall say in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming; And shall begin to smite his fellowservants, and to eat and drink with the drunken; The lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looketh not for him, and in an hour that he is not aware of* (Matthew 24:48-50). Our community is struggling to maintain *the faith* and unfortunately there are increasing occasions when *smiting his fellowservants* is thought to be a solution to faith that is deteriorating on many fronts.

The challenges to *the faith* are increasing and strife and division are to be expected. Jesus said; *Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword... a man's foes shall be they of his own household. He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me... And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me* (Matthew 10:34-38). The Apostle Paul warned us about strife in our community and challenged us to use these occasions as opportunities to be accounted worthy. *For first of all, when ye come together in the church, I*

hear that there be divisions among you; and I partly believe it. For there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you (1 Corinthians 11:18-19).

We live in perilous times, both in the world and in our community. Prophetic indications are that there would be a lack of faith, that many believers would become scoffers, lovers of pleasures. There would be strife among brethren and the cares and pleasures of life would become a source of distraction to many. The Lord will come suddenly to find many caught unawares. What will we do so that we are not among those who walk after their own lusts in these final days?

As the Bridegroom tarried, all of the virgins (wise and foolish) slumbered and slept; there are many indicators that even the wise among us are no longer as alert, no longer as zealous, no longer crying day and night. Have we been caught up in *surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life*?

The question has been asked: *when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?* How will we answer that question? If we want him to find that faith in us, then we must rededicate ourselves to the understanding that *man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God* (Matthew 4:4); that *faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God* (Romans 10:17). We must have unswerving respect for the Bible truths that *without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him* (Hebrews 11:6).

We must take full advantage of our associations with our brethren, edifying one another in the study of God's Word. *Then they that feared the LORD spake often one to another: and the LORD hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the LORD, and that thought upon his name. And they shall be mine, saith the LORD of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him* (Malachi 3:16-17).

There will be faithful servants that are *alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord*. We must do all that we can to *rise up and build* in the few days that remain. *Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another* (Romans 14:19).

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.

“The Fig Tree and All the Trees”

The fig tree is one of the more frequently mentioned trees in the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation. Beginning in Genesis 3:7, *And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons.* Adam and Eve made their first clothing from fig leaves to cover their nakedness, while in Revelation 6:13 we read, *and the stars of heaven fell unto the earth, even as a fig tree casteth her untimely figs, when she is shaken of a mighty wind,* likening the effects of the sixth seal on the nations to the figs that came in winter and did not ripen but fell to the ground in the spring.

The fig was a nutritious fruit harvested in spring and early fall (the spring fruit being the best). The fig tree was an important source of food as well as important for its symbolism. It is identified with the nation of Israel as mentioned in the Old Testament prophecy of Hosea: *I found Israel like grapes in the wilderness; I saw your fathers as the first ripe in the fig tree at her first time: but they went to Baal-peor, and separated themselves unto that shame; and their abominations were according as they loved* (9:10). Jeremiah received the vision of the two baskets of figs which also represented Israel: *Thus saith the LORD, the God of Israel; Like these good figs, so will I acknowledge them that are carried away captive of Judah, whom I have sent out of this place into the land of the Chaldeans for their good* (24:5). By far the most important lesson found associated with the fig tree has to be the Lord Jesus pronouncing judgment on a fruitless fig tree. Some might ask why Christ would place a curse on a fruitless tree, particularly when it appears it was out of season to begin with. Was that fair, did the fruitless tree just happen to be in the wrong place at the wrong time? We will investigate to see if we can answer these questions and others about the connection of the fig tree with the nation of Israel and as a prophetic sign of the coming Kingdom of God.

In the sequence of events that occurred at the beginning of the last week of Jesus' life and ending with his crucifixion, Jesus enters Jerusalem on a donkey colt but late in the day, Jesus and his disciples retired to Bethany about two miles outside Jerusalem. Early the next morning on the way back to Jerusalem, Jesus saw a fig tree *afar off* with leaves and came to it *if haply he might find anything thereon*; but the Scripture records *he found nothing but leaves, for the time of figs was not yet.* Jesus pronounced a curse on the fig tree: *No man eat fruit of thee hereafter forever* (Mark 11:14). Christ then continued on to Jerusalem and the Temple where he cast out the money changers. That evening Christ and the disciples again went out of the city.

The following morning, traveling on the same road, Peter notices that the same fig tree that Jesus had cursed was now dried up and calls Je-

sus' attention to it. Jesus responds to Peters observation by saying, *Have faith in God* and instructs them on the power of faith and prayer (Mark 11:20-26). What is hard for many to understand was why Christ would curse a fruitless tree, particularly when it was out of season. Was it because Christ was hungry and had to look elsewhere for food; did he lose his temper because he was hungry? The answer to these questions, as we know, is that Christ knew exactly what he was doing. It has been suggested that what Jesus was looking for were not figs but green knobs about as big as an almond, which the Palestinian peasants eat to-day and call *tagsh*. These appear sometime before the leaves, but always in the budding time, and, after growing to the size of nuts, fall off to make way for the real fruit. Therefore a fig tree without *tagsh* in the early stage will have no figs later on.

Throughout the Old Testament fig trees are mentioned in relation to Israel as both a blessing and a symbol of God's people. The promised land was described as a land of not only milk and honey, but also a land of vines and figs (Deuteronomy 8:8). When God chose Israel, we're told He delighted in them, as one who finds *the first ripe in the fig tree at her first time* as mentioned above in Hosea. Solomon's peaceful kingdom was a land where Israel "dwelt safely," *every man under his vine and under his fig tree* (1 Kings 4:25). Also the coming time of peace is described as *every man under his vine and under his fig tree* (Micah 4:4), establishing the fruitful fig tree as a symbol of God's blessing of peace and prosperity.

On the other hand, just the opposite is true of a barren and withered fig tree which served as a symbol of God's assessment and judgment against Israel. In Jeremiah 8:13 we read, *I will surely consume them, saith the LORD: there shall be no grapes on the vine, nor figs on the fig tree, and the leaf shall fade; and the things that I have given them shall pass away from them.* Speaking of God's judgment by an invading nation, Joel says, *He hath laid my vine waste, and barked my fig tree: he hath made it clean bare, and cast it away; the branches thereof are made white* (1:7). Through such examples we understand what Christ was trying to tell his disciples, showing them that he was foretelling woe and doom on Israel because of their disobedient, rebellious behavior and fruitlessness.

The withered fig tree seems to be the only miracle in which Jesus used his power to destroy or do away with something. All his other miracles were done for the benefit of men, multiplying the bread, turning water into wine, healing of diseases and resurrecting the dead. Was this miracle out of character for Jesus, who when it was suggested that he destroy the wicked, replied, *But he turned, and rebuked them, and said, Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of* (Luke 9:55)? The facts point to Christ's exceptional character and the fig tree's symbolic meaning, not to Jesus merely acting out

of disappointment.

How soon was Christ's prophecy of the withered fig tree to be fulfilled? The temple would be destroyed in the year A.D. 70. No longer was there a place or opportunity to offer sacrifices and serve the Lord according to the law. Jerusalem would fall into ruin and the nation would be run out of their land and finally scattered throughout the world. **Christ then speaking about the time of his coming Kingdom turns his disciples' attention once again to the fig tree** with a parable, *Now learn a parable of the fig tree; When his branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is nigh: So likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors* (Matthew 24:32-33). It should be noted that this parable was spoken on the same day that the barren fig tree was cursed; would we not assume that when Christ told them to watch for signs to take place on that very same kind of fruit tree it was no coincidence? As a result of the Jews rejection of Christ, God's favor was turned away from them as shown in the withered tree. We can also link the words from the prophet Ezekiel to this parable of the fig tree as he spoke in Ezekiel 17:24, *And all the trees of the field shall know that I the LORD have brought down the high tree, have exalted the low tree, have dried up the green tree, and have made the dry tree to flourish: I the LORD have spoken and have done it.*

In Luke's recording of the parable of the fig tree, Christ added the words "all the trees," *And he spake to them a parable; Behold the fig tree, and all the trees; When they now shoot forth, ye see and know of your own selves that summer is now nigh at hand* (Luke 21:29-30). Many nations have come into being since Christ spoke these words, more so in these last days. The Jews have continued to return to Israel since it was declared a state in 1948 – we see that Israel has indeed been shooting forth leaves. Since the beginning of the 20th century many independent nations have been born, more trees shooting forth leaves. For example in 1945 there were 51 member nations in the United Nations; in 1970 there were 127 including Israel and today there are 192: *Behold the fig tree and all the trees.*

Of particular interest is the emergence of the "tree" nations in the Middle East surrounding Israel. Though the Arab League would have the world believe that Israel is a new nation, a stranger having no place in the midst of their nation members which have been there for centuries, nothing could be further from the truth. The Middle Eastern Arab nations that now exist were brought into existence out of the territory liberated from the Turkish Ottoman Empire after WW1. For instance, Iraq became an independent nation in 1932; Syria in 1946; Lebanon in 1932 and Jordan in 1946 (Congressional Record – House, April 9, 2002). Even Egypt, ruled by the Byzantines and Ottomans from the 7th Century and later occupied by French

and British Empire builders, became a British protectorate in 1914 and was declared by Britain an independent nation in 1922. The 1950's, 60's and 70's saw a number of new Arab nations come into existence, among which are Libya, Sudan, Tunisia, Yemen, Oman, Bahrain, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates. The attention of the whole world is turned to Israel and to these "trees" that have shot forth and are hostile to Israel, *For lo, thine enemies make a tumult, they that hate thee have lifted up the head. They have taken crafty counsel against thy people...They have said, Come, and let us cut them off from being a nation; that the name of Israel may be no more in remembrance* (Psalm 83:2-4).

Brothers and sisters, how blessed we are to be witnessing the fulfillment of latter day prophecies, and how negligent we would be to not conduct ourselves in accord with the hope they present. We are truly living in the last days. Should some ask, "what do we mean by the last days?" ... the answer is given in Luke 21:27, *And **then** shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.*

A fruitless tree is useless to man, just as a spiritually barren nation is useless to God, and Israel was fruitless. The tree dried from the roots up, but the roots were left in the ground, and even though the Jews would be scattered throughout the world, they would always look back to their homeland, where their roots were. Matthew 24:32 is a prophecy regarding the restoration of Israel, *Now learn a parable of the fig tree; When his branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is nigh.* We note the prophecy makes no mention of fruit. There are other Scriptures that make it plain that the fruit will come later but the sign of the tender branch indicating that summer is nigh only requires leaves. That sign is the nation of Israel today. The challenge for us is the following verse, *So likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors.*

The work of Jesus will not have been in vain for the Israelites for the day is coming when they will finally recognize him as their Messiah. For us, however, there is much work to be done to prepare for His coming. Jesus ended his prophecy with the warning of personal preparation. Bible students are sometimes divided on the precise order of events. Sometimes we fail to see the forest because of the trees. God's timetable is not revealed in precise detail, and we're not expected to know exactly how all events will unfold. Yet these prophecies were given to inform and prepare us, and as the Apostle Paul wrote to Timothy, *All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness* (2 Timothy 3:16). Have we heeded his warning; are we ready to meet him?

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“This Generation”

So likewise ye, when ye see these things come to pass, know ye that the kingdom of God is nigh at hand. Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass away, till all be fulfilled (Luke 21:31-32).

A generation is a period of time defined by the key life events of a group of contemporaneous individuals. Historically, as a body, we have devoted much of our attention to the time component of the term *generation*. Recognizing the possibility of mathematically relating the shooting forth of the fig tree to the return of Christ has understandably lead to attempts to assign a number in years to *this generation*.¹ Forty years stands on the evidence of Numbers 32:13: *...he made them wander in the wilderness forty years, until all the generation, that had done evil in the sight of the LORD, was consumed*. Seventy and eighty years are viable candidates based on Psalm 90:10: *The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away*. We can even turn to less precise measures of time such as the actual lifespan of all those alive at the budding of the fig tree, the average time from birth to parenthood, or effectively when a generation replaces itself with the next. Despite the differing times periods, when coupled with the list of potential starting dates for the shooting forth of the fig tree, the conclusion is clear: the return of Christ is very near!

While the quantitative study applying a number of years to *this generation* is edifying and instructive, it is only half of the lesson. As stated above, the individuals living at that time define a generation. They define not only the length of time but also the feel, essence, and qualities of the time period. The Scriptures are the history of God’s dealing with mankind throughout the generations. The history is accentuated with periods of great activity but it is also marked with periods of minimal comment (for example, much of the time between Seth and Noah) and relative silence (like the 400 years in Egypt and the inter-testamentary period). *This generation* spoken of by Christ is not one that escapes such attention; much is written on the character, actions and faith of those individuals who comprise *this generation*.

Who is this generation? Because the tragic and glorious events described by Christ far outlasted his immediate audience, we understand our Savior to be speaking of a generation subsequent to his own. From the context it is that generation positioned to witness the budding of the fig tree – the rebirth of the Nation of Israel. *This generation*, in effect, is the last generation of the Gentile dispensation. *This generation* is our generation!

Even though direct revelation from God ended 1900 years ago, the Word of the Lord has much to say about our generation. Again, we can

consider the concept of a generation narrowly or broadly. A narrow view would be to only consider that which has been said about the household of faith in *this generation*. A broader construction would be an expansion to include the entire human race that composes *this generation*. The Scriptures take both viewpoints in warning of the perils of the time as well as extolling the benefits to those of this generation.

The perils of being in *this generation* are numerous. *This generation* is succinctly characterized by Jesus as: *But as the days of Noe were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be* (Matthew 24:37). Our days are likened unto days of *great wickedness and evil imaginations*, a time that *was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence* (Genesis 6:5, 11). These traits are clearly characteristic of our generation. Wickedness and evil have always existed, however, *this generation* has managed to not only perpetuate deplorable acts and beliefs, but to promote them as acceptable and to glorify them to the impressionable. Most brothers and sisters are blessed to live in relative peace and safety but that does not mean the world is not dangerous and full of strife. We may be spared from some of the most egregious forms of physical violence but hatred and vitriolic speech dominate the conversations of the nations and our generation. Lastly, can we say the devices of *this generation's* hands and the imagination of *this generation's* heart are set to the glory of God? To what achievements and inventions does *this generation* pursue with the most zeal? Is the greatest attention to those that feed the hungry, protect the vulnerable and spread the Word, or is the world happiest with the products of men's imagination that make us richer, distract our brains from legitimate thought, cater to our whims and make life convenient?

The parallel or analogy of our generation with that of Noah indicates it is not a time of great faith. In *the world of the ungodly* (2 Peter 2:5) only *eight souls* were saved (1 Peter 3:20). Of our generation Jesus asked, *Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth* (Luke 18:8)? The greatest peril for *this generation* is our grasp of the Truth. The Truth will exist; it is our fidelity to it that is in jeopardy. We cannot say we weren't warned. With their last messages, the apostles warned of the perils of false beliefs that were arising from without and within. Paul told Timothy, *For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables* (2 Timothy 4:3-4). *This generation* lusts after *smooth things* and would rather have *deceits* than hard truth (Isaiah 30:10). *This generation* is the generation of scoffers and those spiritually asleep. As the men of Noah's generation (who did not know judgment was upon them until the flood came – Matthew 24:39), *this generation* doubts the most fundamental promise

concerning our Savior: that he *shall so come (again) in like manner* (Acts 1:11). Peter predicts they will say, *Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation* (2 Peter 3:4). The peril of *this generation* is the tendency to believe it is not the last generation of this dispensation.

Yet, the blessings of being in *this generation* are great. While the perils are numerous, two great blessings are bestowed upon those living during this period of time. The first is our unique position to study and understand the prophetic word. On this subject H. Grattan Guinness commented, *Hence it is evident that the treasures of chronologic prophecy were committed to earlier ages for the benefit of later ones, and especially of the latest. As the end draws near the mysterious predictions are gradually explained by their own progressive fulfillments, and the light grows stronger and clearer to the close.* Prophets, priests, kings, and earnest believers in past generations all looked forward to the fulfillment of prophecy and attempted to understand it within an incomplete frame of reference. A great gift to our generation is we are able to look back with the aid of history to achieve a level of understanding not available to those previous generations. Also we are blessed with living at a time when we are witnessing prophecy being fulfilled. The case of the restoration of Israel and the taking of Jerusalem are prime examples.

The eleventh chapter of Hebrews closes with a memory verse which speaks of the faithful, *And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise* (Hebrews 11:39). We cite this verse in evidence of the future resurrection, inheritance and Kingdom. The next verse says why we in *this generation* are blessed: *God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect* (Hebrews 11:40). Our brothers and sisters of great faith and service to God who sleep in the dust of the earth await their inheritance. We, brothers and sisters, are the fortunate recipients of the forbearance of God and the timing of His great plan of salvation. What is the *some better thing for us*? That our generation, *this generation*, was allowed the time to come into existence, so that we were born, heard, and given the opportunity to accept God's gift of justification through His son. We in *this generation* are the last to be able to look at that verse and see ourselves.

Josh Vest, Statesboro, GA

¹ The Master's Olivet Prophecy speaks of two different generations both of whom would be witness to great events. First, there were those present when Christ spoke these words which were alive to see the end to Judah's commonwealth in A.D. 70 at the hand of the Romans. The second was a future generation that would be alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord. We have focused our remarks on that latter generation that has witnessed the budding of the fig tree and the other signs given that today's believer might be encouraged to watch, to pray and to lift up his or her head.

“Watch and Pray”

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 21:36). This passage was spoken by our Master at the conclusion of the passage that we know as The Mount Olivet Prophecy. Jesus used this discourse to warn his fellow countrymen and spiritual brethren of the impending destruction that Yahweh would bring upon the Jewish nation because of the unbelief and lack of faith exhibited by that generation. Although these words were spoken over 2000 years ago, they are addressed to all generations of believers having been *written for our admonition*.

The actual words “watch and pray” appear together in only four verses in the New Testament. We find this combination of words in Matthew 26:41; Mark 13:33; Mark 14:38 and the verse above quoted from Luke. The Mark 13:33 reference is also in the context of the Mount Olivet Prophecy, while the passages in Matthew 26:41 and Mark 14:38 were spoken by Jesus when He and His disciples came into the place called Gethsemane, just prior to His arrest and subsequent crucifixion. Christ had asked His disciples to watch with Him. He went further into the garden and fervently prayed. When He returned to His disciples, He found them asleep and asked them why they could not watch with Him for one hour. He told them to *watch and pray that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing but the flesh is weak* (Matthew 26:41).

Brethren, when we consider the context of these situations, we understand that they were spoken in the darkest hours of the history of the Jewish nation. The rejection of their Messiah led to the destruction of the Jewish economy. We all know the history of the judgments of Yahweh poured out upon Israel in A.D. 70. The temple, the law, the priesthood and the land were destroyed and overrun by the Gentile Roman conqueror.

Do we see similarities between the condition of the Jewish nation during the first century and these latter days of the Gentile kingdoms of men that we are living in? Let us consider: Where does the Body of Christ (each ecclesia and each covenanted individual) stand in the eyes of Yahweh? Does the commandment to **watch and pray** have practical meaning to the believers of this generation? What are we to watch for? What are we to pray for? Are we spiritually asleep or are we watching so we do not enter into temptation? Are we watching the events of the political world so that we may be strengthened by our witness of prophecy being fulfilled? Are we watching our own selves so that we overcome the lusts of the flesh, the lusts of the eyes and the pride of life? Are we watching and addressing the works of our spiritual family and the spiritual house of Yahweh? Is our spiritual

condition lukewarm like that of the Laodiceans in the first century or is it robust and thriving? Do we walk after the example of our Lord and His apostles? Do we maintain sound doctrine in our teachings from our ecclesial podiums, Bible Schools and periodicals of the Truth? Are we true watchmen in the sense of the teaching in Ezekiel 33:2-9?

We can deny our Lord in many ways, allowing the works of the flesh to overcome and place us in the position of denying His commandments, His precepts and His example. We are blessed with the Word of God to direct us that we may deny *the works of the flesh* and *walk in the Spirit* (Galatians 5:15-25). Do we find ourselves taking pleasure in the works of the flesh rather than the spiritual works to which we have committed? We should earnestly pray that we may overcome the enticements of the world in which we live. We should be content with the many blessings that we are allowed to enjoy, and should constantly rejoice in the promises on record for His servants – eternal life in the age to come, the promise of ruling and reigning with the Lord of Lords and King of Kings and the promise of complete reconciliation with our Heavenly Father. We should live our lives after the example of Israel's Messiah, enduring the pain and sufferings of this world, remembering and meditating on the joy set before us. ***Watch and pray that ye enter not into temptation;*** we must crucify the works of the flesh, we must not be conformed to this world! The trials and tribulations that come our way are only temporal and should serve as reminders and opportunities to conduct ourselves as true servants of our Lord and faithful sons and daughters of our Father in Heaven. Let us always remember the words of Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:58, *Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.*

These are the last days and we are experiencing the declining health of our spiritual family. We may be reminded of times in which members of our natural family were also in their declining and troubled years. We may have experienced periods of time in which the physical condition of these natural family members continued to grow weaker and weaker. In many of these situations, we may not have been able to do anything for the family member except **watch and pray**. As we have watched and observed these loved ones, we may have only been able to provide encouragement and comfort and pray that Yahweh might strengthen them. We can help with medications and doctors' visits and provide for their natural needs as much as we can, but at the end of the day, we continue to pray. Every one of us would do these things for their natural family without fail. One of the first things that a caregiver has to do is to understand the magnitude of the condition and the needs of the one being cared for. What is needed? What can be

provided? How can I encourage and strengthen them? Still, they also are expected to take precautions and provide for themselves as best they are able.

Brethren, we should manifest this same love and care for our spiritual family! Each member of the Body of Christ, especially mature brothers and sisters, should be able to assess the strengths and the needs of their brethren and their ecclesia. Has the Body become sickened and weakened through false doctrine, immoral works of the flesh, or more importantly, have we weakened the body by our own action or inaction? There are times in our probationary life in which each of us will face personal trials related to walk and doctrine. In 1 Timothy 4, we are told to give attendance to reading, to exhortation and to doctrine. Verse 16 admonishes us to *Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them; for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself and them that hear thee*. The two primary things that we are here told to watch and pray for are first, for ourselves and then, for the doctrine. We cannot heed one and not the other. We must do both. We cannot stand by and expect someone else to assume our responsibilities. We realize the pain and suffering that is experienced during times of tribulation within the Brotherhood, yet the inspired writers have left admonitions and exhortations on record to strengthen us in these troubling times. Scriptural words and phrases such as Take Heed; See; Understand; Remember; Be Steadfast; Hold Fast; Be Strong and of a Good Courage are strengthening words to remember when we are under siege from any trial.

We should never be slack in going to the Divine source for strength, and we must not let peer pressure from our brethren or the world prevent us from doing the will of our heavenly Father. If we are having difficulties overcoming some aspect of our flesh, there is scripture given to strengthen us in each particular situation that we may face as individual brothers or sisters of Christ. Is this not what our Lord's example teaches us, to seek out a "thus saith the Lord" or an "it is written?" In our darkest hours, there is always comfort to be found in God's Word. In the hardest trials that any man has ever faced, Christ always turned to His Father and always committed Himself to His Father's will. Let us maintain a determination to sacrifice our thoughts, words and actions when they are in opposition to those precious words of Truth that we are blessed and privileged to understand.

In addition to watching and praying for ourselves, our ecclesia, and the entire Body of Christ, we are commanded to watch the activities of the nations of the world. This aspect of watching gives us hope through assurance of the accuracy and integrity of the prophetic word of the coming Kingdom, a Kingdom that we long for and hope to see established in the very near future. One outcome of watching for those things coming upon

this earth is an increase in our confidence and joy. There are many things that distress us in this probationary life. However, we should remember that all these things will ultimately be of little consequence to those who will be granted a place in the Kingdom alongside the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Let us be like Paul and *press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus* (Philippians 3:14). Let us run the race with patience and remember that the reward of eternal life and immortality is set before us as the prize to be granted in that glorious future.

Watch and pray that ye enter not into temptation. These are beautiful words that should always encourage and strengthen us to watch these three things – ourselves, the Body of Christ and the events of the nations around us. Let us **watch and pray** that we may be part of that glorious multitude as is described in 2 Timothy 4:8. *There is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day; and not to me only, but unto all them also that love His appearing.* The love of His appearing is manifest through our **watching and praying** without ceasing.

Bobby Henderson, Maumelle, AR



“Accounted Worthy to Obtain That World”

The words “accounted worthy” constitute a declaration of hope as well as a clear reminder that salvation is the gift of God and not something earned (Romans 6:23). This concept (*kataxioo*) appears only four times in Scripture, twice as “accounted worthy” (Luke 20:35; 21:36) and twice as “counted worthy” (Acts 5:41; 2 Thessalonians 1:5). The principle reflects a Divine pronouncement reflecting Yahweh’s love, grace and mercy similar to the principle declared in Romans chapter 4 where we read of righteousness being “imputed.” Though Scripture declares we must develop *through much tribulation* a character fit for the kingdom, the primary focus of this article will be on what those accounted worthy are “to obtain.” The depth and fullness of the implication is most completely revealed in the celebrated passage wherein the Sadducees were put to silence by Jesus in Luke 20:35. The Sadducees did not believe in resurrection yet boasted in Moses. They sought to challenge Jesus with the hypothetical case of a woman who had seven husbands, asking, “In the resurrection, whose wife is she?” Our Lord’s response not only silenced them, but revealed a depth of implication for those who shall be *accounted worthy to obtain that world*.

In Jesus’ response we read, *But they which are accounted worthy to obtain*

*that world, and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry, nor are given in marriage: Neither can they die any more: for they are **equal unto the angels**; and are the **children of God**, being the **children of the resurrection**.*

The descriptions above may be read by some as merely further accolades associated with those “accounted worthy,” yet they declare a depth of meaning that neither the Sadducees nor we may immediately comprehend in that in this passage we find ourselves focused on the surety of resurrection. In this review we will consider the fullness of our Lord’s declaration in regard to “equal unto the angels” and the “children of God,” for these references were intended to bring to mind the fullness of the exaltation that those who serve might look forward to.

First let us consider the hope of being “accounted worthy to obtain” within the framework of the divinely appointed principle of ‘probation before exaltation,’ or, as Solomon phrased it, *before honour is humility* (Proverbs 15:33).

Our probation begins when we put on Christ in the Divinely appointed manner. It should reflect our love of God and obedience to the Divine commandments with its consequence of self-denial, affliction and humility – the trial of a faithful walk consistent with our Father’s righteousness and supremacy. Paul instructs that we must *through much tribulation* enter the kingdom and further refers to our trial as a “warfare,” for once we put on Christ we must identify ourselves with the work of the Truth to which our flesh naturally rebels. It is oneness with the Father and Son that can make us *perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is well pleasing in his sight* (Hebrews 13:21). We are admonished to *be transformed*, continually adding to our faith that we be not *conformed to this world*, understanding and practicing the principle that Samuel expressed to Saul, *to obey is better than sacrifice*. It is a continual process of watching and praying, adding to our faith and forsaking / confessing our sins through our mediator Jesus Christ. The law of Christ is comprehensive and stringent and the real nature of the struggle is only realized by those who constantly endeavor to put those precepts into daily practice; yet it is this trial that develops the character fit for God’s use.

The prospect of exaltation serves to motivate and strengthen the faithful probation. In this matter we hope to show that the very description of promise that Jesus mentions in Luke 20:35 opens to us such unfathomable glory that no reasonable person, convinced of the Truth, would hesitate to throw in his lot with Jesus Christ...be the conditions of probation what they may!

By exaltation is meant the gift of eternal life and a position of honor and glory in the kingdom of God! With our death or the appearance of our

Lord our probation ends, and with the judicial pronouncement to *enter into the joy of thy Lord* exaltation begins, and the labors, afflictions and self-denial of the probation period will be but an incidental prelude to the eternal glory and blessedness conferred. Let us now look closer at our Lord's references to that glory in his response to the Sadducees in Luke 20:36: "equal unto the angels" and the "children of God."

Equal unto the Angels: This is a state of existence we cannot fully comprehend despite the insights provided us in the Scriptures. Christ told the Sadducees that those accounted worthy to obtain that world would be "equal unto the angels" and further declared them as "children of God" and "children of the resurrection," dying no more and neither marrying nor given in marriage. What is an angel? The Greek *angelos* means messenger and is used in reference to mortal as well as immortal beings. That immortal angels are presented as corporeal beings is clear from the many instances in the Scriptures where men have seen, talked to, entertained and even wrestled with angels of God they supposed to be men. The two angels that destroyed Sodom spent a night in Lot's house and "did eat" of the feast he prepared, while the angel Jacob struggled with weakened Jacob's thigh to release himself from his hold. This is not to imply that angels are human, but rather that the human form is angelic! David testified through the spirit that man was made *a little lower than the angels* (Psalm 8:5); lower as to nature, but in their image as to form – *Let us make man in our image, after our likeness* (Genesis 1:26). Equality with the angels is a promise to be achieved when our Lord shall *change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body* (Philippians 3:21). In this life we bear *the image of the earthly*, but those "accounted worthy to obtain" shall *bear the image of the heavenly* (1 Corinthians 15:49). Brethren, as Paul admonishes, how shall we *neglect so great salvation* when such opportunity and honor is held in store for us as rulers within the kingdom, *for unto the angels hath he not put in subjection the world to come* (Hebrews 2:3-5)!

Children of God: Referencing those resurrected individuals accounted worthy to obtain the world to come, the Lord Jesus refers to them as the "children of God." We recognize it is covenant relationship and a faithful walk in the promise of resurrection to life that initially establishes and qualifies one for sonship with God. Yet Christ here declares *...and are the children of God, being the children of the resurrection*, establishing resurrection – both to glory and equality with the angels – as the final and necessary step to present them as children of God in the full and final sense.

We see this same pattern applied to our Savior. Though acknowledged as the Son of God by the angel Gabriel at his birth and by a voice from heaven at his baptism, David by inspiration prophesied, *I will declare the decree:*

the Lord hath said unto me, Thou art my son; this day have I begotten thee (Psalm 2:7). Acts 13:33 declares, *God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that he hath raised up Jesus again; as it is also written in the second psalm, Thou art my son, this day have I begotten thee.* Christ's example illustrates that the resurrection to glory is the necessary and essential step to be begotten as sons and daughters of our Heavenly Father.

Consider dear brethren, the honor and majesty of being elevated to sons and daughters of the Eternal God! Those "accounted worthy" will be elevated to an angelic state and "in the name" of their Father. In his letter to the ecclesia at Philadelphia Christ held out this promise, *To him that overcometh...I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem...and I will write upon him my new name* (3:12). The honor and power of immortals bearing God's name is clearly established in the cases of His angelic messengers in such references as Exodus 23:20-21, *Behold I send an angel before thee...Beware of him, and obey his voice, provoke him not; for he will not pardon your transgressions: for my name is in him.* Yahweh's name is above every name, and its application here is not merely to distinguish His family, but to embody them into His nature and character.

The one last consideration to be addressed is the identity of "that world" to be obtained by those "accounted worthy." The Greek word rendered "world" here is *aion*, interpreted *eternity* and *age*. This word has an indefinite quality about it, used in the sense of "evermore" in Revelation 1:18 – *I am he that liveth, and was dead; and behold, I am alive for evermore (aion);* and in reference to the "world to come" in Mark 10:30 – *and in the world (aion) to come eternal (aionian) life.* In our subject verse *they which are accounted worthy to obtain that world (aion)* obtain that *aion* to come – that age or dispensation identified as the kingdom age, in which Jesus says they will die no more, being *equal unto the angels*. This is the future *aion* in which *God will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained* (Acts 17:31), and those "accounted worthy" are to be elevated as co-rulers with him.

Dear brethren, how can we neglect so great salvation with such mighty and sure promises before us, when those accounted worthy to obtain that world will serve with Christ in the administration of that world as angelic sons and daughters of the Most High!

Jim Washeck, St. Peters, MO

About The Front Cover – A couple, gazing at the heavens in New Zealand, observes shooting stars. Our Lord foretold signs in the sun, moon and stars (Luke 21:24) at the time of his second coming – symbolically referencing human governments as the political heavens as well as the possibility of literal phenomena like the star that appeared at the time of his birth.

GOD'S 7000 YEAR PLAN

