

Pentecost and Prophecy

by: Ronald L. Dart

In Leviticus 23 verse 15, it says "You shall count unto you from the morrow after the sabbath, from the day that you brought the sheaf of the wave offering; seven sabbaths shall be complete: {16} Even unto the morrow after the seventh sabbath shall you number fifty days; and you shall offer a new meal offering to the LORD."

This is an interesting little passage and is something that has occupied the technicians, as it were, of the church for many years. The question about Pentecost, when Pentecost should be observed, the meaning behind Pentecost. The meaning of the days leading up to Pentecost.

This is really an interesting little passage and it's not that difficult to understand.

Holy Days Are Prophetic

The holy days in Israel were, as all of us by now understand, prophetic. They look forward and picture God's plan. They actually carry out in a little image, as it were, on the stage of the Temple, an annual cycle that showed forth God's plan and what God was doing. A plan which some people understood, better. Some people understood less, but I don't think anyone in Old Testament times understood all that well.

The fact is, that the holy days have more meaning, I think, for Christians than they ever had for Israel of old and it's important for us to understand.

In the scheme of things, these festivals were all organized around the harvest seasons. The idea was that the spring harvest that began during the days of unleavened bread, you were not supposed to eat any of that, until after you offered the first little firstfruits of it to God. That was the wave sheaf, a little basket full of grain that was taken from a sheaf that was harvested. It was taken into the Temple and presented before God, and after that, you could then eat the harvest and begin the harvest and it ushered in a straight seven weeks of work. As the instructions come, there would be seven weeks complete. You work six days, rest the seventh, work six days and rest the seventh. It was a harvest time.

By the time you come to what we call Pentecost, which is probably better called, the feast of first fruits, you have reached the completion of the first fruits harvest, the whole thing is all in and you come before God, to thank God for the harvest just past.

The festival of Pentecost or the feast of firstfruits, we tend to forget a little bit where it comes from, because we had gotten divorced from our roots of the land, but nevertheless it was a harvest festival of thanksgiving for a harvest past and it was called the feast of the firstfruits.

The period of time of these seven weeks of harvest leading up to the feast of firstfruits, actually represent the work of the Messiah, from the time He was accepted by God as the first of the firstfruits, until His return and His institution really of His kingdom and the beginning of the Kingdom of God.

So that we understand then, the seven weeks leading up to Pentecost, was a time of work and since they were a time of work, they had been punctuated by periods of rest. So there were the seven sabbaths that lead up to Pentecost and they represent in the prophetic scheme of things, the fact that there would be a long period of time in which Christ would work, gathering in His firstfruits and then that would culminate in the feast of firstfruits and the return of Christ.

Now if you turn back to the book of Acts, we can perhaps understand then from this perspective, the importance of the festival and how it played out and why Peter said some of the things that he said.

In years gone by, we were sort of locked into a certain way of looking at these festivals. The time sequence of them had us a little bit buffaloed in the sense that we thought that the Passover, of course, represented Christ's sacrifice, and the days of unleavened bread pictured putting sin out of our lives and then came Pentecost which represented receiving the Holy Spirit and as you know that's a logical assumption considering what happened on the feast of Pentecost. Then the Feast of Trumpets pictured the return of Christ, the Day of Atonement the binding of Satan and finally the Feast of Tabernacles.

Prophetic Significance of Pentecost

What is oftentimes, almost entirely overlooked in the past, was the prophetic significance of Pentecost and what it really looked forward to. Not merely what it had looked back upon, the receiving of the Holy Spirit, but what it looked forward to.

Now in this second chapter of Acts verse 1, we are told, "When the Day of Pentecost was fully come, the 50th day had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. {2} And suddenly there came a sound from heaven like a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. {3} And there appeared to them distributed tongues like fire and it sat upon each of them {4} And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other languages as the Spirit gave them utterance. {5} Now there were dwelling at Jerusalem, Jews, devout men out of every nation under heaven. {6} Now when it was noised abroad," all these men came rolling into the Temple to find out what's happened.

There had been a spectacular display and all of a sudden a group of rather ignorant men are beginning to speak in foreign languages and we are beginning to understand them in the languages wherein we were born.

It would be like a group of us and all we speak is English, finding ourselves in a multilingual society where there are all sorts of people there and suddenly one of us is speaking German, another is speaking French. Another is speaking one of the dialects of India or whatever language it was for people to come from to be with us, and to be able to speak fluently in those languages the wonderful works of God, and to be understood by people who were there.

It was a remarkable occurrence to say the least.

What happened on this day is not that difficult to understand. The 2000 year work, which we can look back and understand, was a 2000 year work because these gentlemen didn't know how long they had, but the work of 2000 years, this work was beginning and they were being empowered to do the work. It was necessary, since they would not have been going out into a world that was as multilingual as ours, or with the capacity for electronic dissemination of the gospel as ours, they were going to have to go places and speak to people in their own language and so these men were empowered to go out and do that job.

Now everybody who came and watched this spectacle, it was unusual enough in appearance to say the least, that they said "Well what's going on? Are these guys drunk?"

"Peter stood up," Acts 2 verse 14, "with the eleven, lifted up his voice and said, "Men of Judea and all you that dwell at Jerusalem be this known to you and listen to my words, {15} These are not drunk as you suppose, seeing it is but the third hour of the day, {16} But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel."

Now what is fascinating about this is that Peter understands fully what he is saying. There's been much made over the years that the apostles really believed that Christ would come back in their lifetime. They did not believe they had 2000 years of work to look forward to, in fact, I think it would have been very defeating to them, had they imagined that they had 2000 years ahead of them. They had no idea. They had heard Jesus say, "No man knows the day or the hour" (Matthew 25:13), and so they did not know the day or the hour.

But they also had the instructions of Christ that they were to be ready all the time and they would be pursuing it all the time and there are little hints in their work, that they really anticipated that it would take place within their own generation. They had reason to feel that way about it.

And so Peter, understanding the implication of this, speaks of the culmination of the feast of Pentecost, not the inception of the feast of Pentecost. In other words, Pentecost originally

was a simple agricultural festival, a harvest festival of thanksgiving to God for what had been given.

In its prophetic sense, though, it meant much more than that. In its immediate sense for the church, it meant being empowered to do the work, receiving the Holy Spirit, but not merely receiving the Holy Spirit, being empowered by the Holy Spirit to actually preach, in whatever language that was necessary, and of course, that power also included the power to heal, the power to cast out demons, and the other general things that were the work of the ministry.

Peter fully understood that there was a prophetic element of Pentecost, that looked well ahead into the future and it was much more than the simple agricultural festival and much more than merely receiving the Holy Spirit, much more than a display of spiritual gifts for whatever reason.

The idea that we should all speak in tongues and perhaps to dance around here under the spirit would be an interesting display and everyone might enjoy it and feel uplifted by it, but that's not what Pentecost was about as Peter well understood.

Fulfillment Of Pentecost

Peter's response to it, and him telling that the fulfillment of it comes straight out of a prophet Joel is significant.

This is what was said by the prophet Joel, Acts 2 verse 17, "It shall come to pass in the last days," says God, "I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh. Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams, {18} And on my servants and my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my spirit and they will prophesy."

What is fascinating is that there is not one word there to suggest that they would speak in tongues. How then is this a fulfillment of this? The point is, the tongues is not what was important. They were prophesying in other languages. It was fulfilled not in the tongues, the tongues were merely a means to an end. The end was the prophecy that they were making and the prophesying that they were doing.

Peter went on in verse 19, "I will show wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath. Blood and fire and vapor of smoke, {20} The sun shall be turned into darkness and the moon into blood before that great and notable day of the Lord come, {21} And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved."

So here is what Peter understood to be coming down in this. He understood that the ultimate fulfillment was Joel's prophecy and what was taking place on this particular day, he saw, as

an introduction or a stepping into or a type of what was ultimately going to be fulfilled on Pentecost, which was leading up to and culminating in the day of the Lord.

Now Pentecost is the terminus, the end of a seven week work period. In type, it's the terminus of this age. The terminus of the work of this age. The terminus of the time in which the Messiah would be calling out the first fruits and it brings us into the day of the Lord.

Now let's compare this to what Joel and Peter had to say with what we find in Revelation the sixth chapter. Now Revelation the sixth chapter is interesting. Of course all of Revelation is interesting. It is the source of great fascination to people down through generations.

This is the time where John (Revelation 5:1) "saw in the right hand of Him who sat on the throne and a scroll written inside and on the back, sealed with seven seals. {2} Then I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, "Who is worthy to open the scroll and to loose its seals?"

At first John was very disturbed wondering who could open the seals, who could possibly let them see what was inside. Of course, the Lamb, Jesus Christ, was found worthy to open the seals and reveal what was going to take place.

In chapter 6 it says, "And I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seals, and I heard, as it were the voice of thunder, one of the four beasts saying, "Come and see."

Then follows the visions of the opening of the first four seals and the four Horsemen of the Apocalypse. The fifth seal which was a time of persecution and it was a thing that was going to happen to the church in the first century in which they were going to experience in the next few years and of course would also culminate in what would happen to the church at the end time.

When it becomes interesting for us today is in verse 12. "I beheld when He had opened the sixth seal, and there was a great earthquake, and the sun became black like sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood, {13} And the stars of heaven fell to the earth, like a fig tree casts her untimely figs, when she is shaken of a mighty wind."

I have heard that. You are standing there and wind blows through the trees and plop plop plop as things come off the tree onto the ground. It's hard to imagine stars, I am sure that it means meteors falling to the earth like a fig tree having shaken itself and figs falling on the ground around you.

Verse 14, "And the heaven departed like a scroll when it is rolled together, and every mountain and island were moved out of their places. {15} And the kings of the earth, and the great men, the rich men, the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman and every free man, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains, {16} And said to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sits on the

throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb. {17} For the great day of His wrath is come, and who shall be able to stand."

This is basically the time that Joel was talking about in his prophecy. And it is the time that, since Peter decided to quote Joel, that what was happening on the day of Pentecost, this is that spoken by the prophet Joel.

The sun is going to be darkened, the moon turned into blood, there will be earthquakes and stars falling out of heaven. It is going to be quite an exciting time to be anywhere on the face of the earth.

Seventh Seal Opened

Then comes chapter 8 of Revelation, where the seventh seal is opened. "When he had opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven about the space of half an hour. {2} And then he saw seven angels handed seven trumpets."

Now just to pause and think about what we were looking at for a moment. I'm not going to take the time today to go through all the seals and trumpets and the things in Revelation, because that's not the point. Pentecost is the point and what I want to talk about today.

But in the pattern that we see developing, looking at the sequence of the holy days during the year and their prophetic sequence, naturally the Passover is a time of our having sin put out of our lives by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ and the Passover and the seven days of the Passover festival, which we call the Days of Unleavened Bread, have their role in the redemption of Christ. The next step down the road is the Wave Sheaf Offering, that is the acceptance of Christ before the Father and then the beginning of seven weeks of work leading up to Pentecost.

There are seven weeks of work, so there's a long period of time in which work is done. The work is a harvest. The work in the harvest of people. It is a harvest of the first fruits to God and the Lamb, of people who are being baptized, who are receiving God's Spirit, who are going to live out their lives and of course ultimately be in the first resurrection, when they are finally harvested and presented before God.

This period of time follows down to Pentecost, which if we are to take the verbiage used by Peter and by Joel and compare it with the Book of Revelation, we would conclude then that Pentecost seems to be associated with the sixth seal, then it does make sense, because the very next holy day is the Feast of Trumpets, which is associated with the seventh seal. So work your way through that little prophetic cycle and you see the sort of thing that begins to happen.

A Famine of the Word of God

Now page back to the Old Testament again to Amos. Amos the eighth chapter. Here in Amos 8 is a fascinating little passage that many of us have pondered and looked at and thought about. Amos the eighth chapter and beginning in verse nine, "In that day it shall come to pass, saith the LORD, that I will cause the sun to go down at noon, and I'll darken the earth in the clear day."

Once again the same sort of pattern that Peter described, relative to the fulfillment of Pentecost, that Joel describes as the day of the Lord, and that Revelations six and the sixth seal describes the day of the Lord.

Amos 8 verse 10, "I will turn your feasts into mourning, and all your songs into lamentation, and I will bring sackcloth upon your loins, and baldness upon every head, and I will make it as the mourning of death of an only son, and the end thereof is as a bitter day. { 11 } Behold, the days come, saith the LORD GOD, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD: { 12 } And they shall wander from sea to sea, and from the north to the south, they shall run to and fro to seek the word of the LORD, and they shall not find it."

Now for all the years that I've been in the church, every once in a while, this will come up in someone's sermon on prophecy, that as we get down toward the time of the end, in the latter-days, somehow in connection with the day of the Lord, there is going to come a time when people are still here, doing whatever people do, and they're going to be looking for the Word of God. They will go coast-to-coast and from North to South, place to place, looking for some word from God, and will not be able to find it. There will be a famine of hearing the Word of God.

I have always wondered when I read that, "Where am I? Where are you? Where is the church if there is to be a famine of hearing of the Word of God on this earth?" Those of us who have been called of God, commissioned of God, who believe in God and understand Christ's words have an imperative. That imperative is: "Go into all the world and make disciples of all nations, baptize them, teach them to observe all things which I command you" (Matthew 28:19-20). That is as long as we have breath, strength and power and whatever it takes to do it. There is an imperative upon those of us, who call ourselves by the name of Christ to evangelize, to reach out to people, and yet we are told there will come a time when that will not be done.

I thought about that when, I realized that right at the end of the sixth seal and about the time when the seventh seal is to be broken, that there is silence in heaven for the space of half an hour (Revelation 8:1). I have often read that. You know people often toss around their jokes about it but what's going on? Why is there silence for the space of half an hour? Does God have nothing to say? Do the Angels have nothing to say? Do the 24 elders have nothing to

say? Is there just total silence all over heaven for half an hour or is God silent to man for the space of about half an hour?

Understanding that the book of Revelation is all in symbols, and when we are talking about an hour, a day or a year, that we may be talking about some indeterminate time, short time, long time, not necessarily that the 144,000 does not speak to us mathematically from the book of Revelation, nor does 1260 days, nor do many of these things that we read. People take them and try to approach them with calendars, math and calculators. They are not intended really to speak to us mathematically and nor is this half hour of silence in heaven supposed to speak to us on your wristwatch. There is going to come a period of time when there is going to be absolute silence in heaven and from heaven.

Amos calls this a time of famine of hearing of the word of God, that there is simply nothing being heard by man.

There have been times in the history of man when God has been absolutely silent. We don't know of all of them, I'm sure, although there are times right now when one almost wonders where and how is God speaking to man even now?

God Was Silent in the Days of Samuel

There was a time, for example, after Samuel had been given to serve in the Tabernacle. His mother had been bitter because of not having had any children. She had gone up to pray and she made a promise that if God would give her a son, she would give him to God for all of his life. God gave her a son and she was as good as her word, when her son was weaned, she brought him back and gave him to God, and the priests took this young child, which must've seem strange, I suppose, and raised this child and finally Samuel came of age.

It tells us in first Samuel three and verse one "The Word of the LORD was rare in those days; there was no widespread revelation, dreams, visions or oracles."

God was essentially silent. Samuel was in his bed one night, it tells us in verse 3, that "before the lamp of God went out in the Tabernacle," whether it meant that that light, which was never supposed to go out, was about to go out, symbolizing maybe even the light of God's word going out among these people, I don't know.

What is interesting about it is, that for a long time, there had been no open vision, no frequent word, nobody had been hearing anything from God, up until the moment of Samuel, God had for a time been silent to these people. Then comes the voice out of the dark to Samuel and Samuel not being habituated nor was anybody else habituated for that matter, to assume that voice came from God because He had not been speaking. Samuel went to the high priest Eli and said, "Did you call me?" Eli said, "I didn't call you, go back and lie down." The story goes on from there, and of course Samuel becomes a great judge and a great prophet of God. God speaks to him and through him to Israel for many years to follow.

God Was Silent in the Days Before Jesus

Jesus came at the end of a long period when God had been silent to man.

In Matthew the fourth chapter and beginning in verse 13, "Leaving Nazareth, Jesus came and dwelt in Capernaum, which is on the seacoast in the borders of Zebulun and Naphtali, {14} That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying, {15} "The land of Zebulun, in the land of Naphtali, by the way of the sea, beyond Jordon, Galilee of the Gentiles, {16} The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and to them which sat in the region and shadow of death light is sprung up. {17} From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, "Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

There was a long time in which God did not talk, did not speak, did not talk to these people. He carried no message and finally at the end of a long period of darkness, Jesus came on the scene and began to preach saying, "Repent, the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

The Work of Christ Through The Church

Jesus went through His period of time of his ministry and then came His death, His sacrifice for us. Then came the feast of Pentecost and then entered a long period of time of the work of the church, that is the work of Christ through the church, reaching out to the world, of taking the gospel to the four corners of the world, of Paul going to Europe, of preaching all over the place.

I wonder over the years that have followed since that time, how many times have there been, with the church for one reason or another, went quiet? When there was no real work being done. When God was not moving in the hearts of men to go out and preach. That when persecution had driven the church underground in which they would not be able to preach, would not be able to do anything, because there were such times. God used persecution in some cases to scatter the church. In other cases he used persecution to silence the church. Yes to silence the church.

Now we are given the suggestion that perhaps somewhere, all the way down to the very end time, the church will be silenced again.

This is That which was Spoken By Joel the Prophet

Turn back with me to Joel, because there is an interesting thing to understand out of this prophecy that is worth looking at. Since Peter quoted it the way that he did, telling us, "This is that which is spoken by the prophet Joel," connecting it to the feast of Pentecost.

I am going to begin reading in Joel the second chapter verse one, "Blow the trumpet in Zion."

Now you're almost immediately tempted to connect this to the Feast of Trumpets, but the trumpet is simply an alarm of war. The trumpets were also blown during the festivals.

"Blow the trumpet in Zion, sound the alarm in my holy mountain, let all the inhabitants of the land tremble for the day of the LORD comes, for it is near at hand. {2} A day of darkness and of gloominess, a day of clouds and of thick darkness, like the morning spread upon the mountains: a great people and strong; there has not been ever the like before it, neither shall be any more after it, even to the years of many generations. {3} A fire devours before them; and behind them a flame burns: the land is as the garden of Eden before them, and behind them it is a desolate wilderness."

Joel talks about these people as a great army sent by God to carry out a punishment upon a people.

Verse 9, "They shall run to and fro in the city; they shall run upon the wall, they shall climb up upon the houses; they shall enter in at the windows like a thief. {10} The earth shall quake before them; the heavens shall tremble: the sun and the moon shall be dark, and the stars shall withdraw their shining."

This is what Peter talked about when he said, "This is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel."

Continuing in verse 11, "And the LORD shall utter his voice before his army: for his camp is very great: for he is strong that executes his word: for the day of the LORD is great and very terrible; and who can abide it? {12} Therefore turn to me, saith the LORD, turn you even to me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning: {13} And rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the LORD your God: for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and relents from punishment."

God has no interest whatsoever in seeing a people come to this pass. God has no desire to see it come to that. The role of the prophets, as we find them again and again and again throughout the pages of the Bible, is not simply to foretell the future. It is to give meaning to the future. It is to tell people what's going to happen, and also why it is going to happen. The reason they are told why, is to give them some slack, not slack to keep doing what they're doing, but slack to turn their life around, to turn to God with weeping. To rend their hearts and not their garments. To find some way to begin to change their life. The whole point of prophecy, is not just to satisfy our curiosity about what's going to happen next month, next week, next year or to give us the number of days so we can count them off from this heavenly sign to the next.

It is so that we will know that God's hand is in history, so that we will know that God's word is true, so that we will have time to change our lives. Time to set our feet in the path of righteousness. and to live in a different and right way. This is the reason why these prophecies are given to us.

The Seventh Sabbath

As I thought about the seventh Sabbath, and I thought about the connection between Pentecost and the day of the Lord, it seemed timely in a way to think about this day in the sense that, the seventh Sabbath, may well represent the very last silence before the return of Christ. The last rest, that is given to His people. The last time that God closes things down so that the next moment that He speaks is the day of the Lord.

It was very sobering to me to think about this last night and this morning as I was pondering what I would talk about today and pondering the significance of these seven weeks or seven sabbaths leading up to this day and to realize that what lies ahead of us and what we have long preached, the kingdom of God, you cannot get from here to there, with this world that you and I live in right now, then there is the world of the kingdom of God, with Christ being here and ruling the nations and bringing peace on earth.

There is no way to get from here to there without passing through the day of the Lord, with all that it means, with all that it is going to entail, with all of the catastrophe, with all of the fright, with all the fear, to the place to where I know men's hearts, as it tells us, men's hearts will just quit, because of what they're actually seeing with their eyes and hearing with their ears, and the ones who still are there and their hearts are surviving, are calling up on the rocks and mountains to fall on them, to hide them from the face of the Lamb. Not some awesome fearsome demon, but from the face of the Lamb, Jesus Christ, because of who they are, or what they are or what they have done with their life.

We just can't get from here to there without passing through the day of the Lord, with all that that means. And also, you cannot pass from here to there without going through a time of a famine of hearing the word of God. I wonder where we are?

All in the Church Believe They Are Living In The Last Days

As you think back that every generation of the church, I feel quite safe in saying, have believed that they are living in the last days. The first century church believed it. The second century, I'm sure they believed it. The third, fourth, fifth. I bet that you could have found a preacher in every century of man since Jesus, who was proclaiming that Jesus Christ will return to this earth in their lifetime and that the world will come to an end in their lifetime.

But of course there was a work to be done, but they did not know how long that work would go on. They did not know how long they personally would be able to do it. They did not know how long their own life would last. They had no idea whether Christ would come within their lifetime or within their son's lifetime or how long it might be. I can imagine how discouraging, how profoundly discouraging it would be, to think that we had another 500 years to go. In one sense, I suppose many people would be relieved and say, "Oh boy, that will not come in my lifetime. I'm just as happy as I can be not to have to face or to go through those things." I can understand that perspective and frame of mind.

But one wonders, don't we, where are we and what are we supposed to do? The fact is, that there is, it seems a schedule, there is a clock that is running.

No One Knows When Jesus Will Return

When people asked Jesus about His return, Jesus said in Matthew 24 verse 36, "But of that day and hour knows no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only."

In fact, no one has any idea of it, but God the Father only.

One of the first things a cult leader wants to do is to deny that Scripture. They believe that they have come to the place where they know. I don't know whether Jesus will come in my lifetime or not. I would say that those people who think that He will not, well you have His word that says, "I'm going to come at a time when you think not." So I'm always afraid to have an opinion on the subject, one way or the other, and I think that's probably just as well.

One thing I do know that we have been at this thing for quite a long time now. We have been preaching this word for a long time. I don't mean in my lifetime or Herbert Armstrong's lifetime or Andrew Dugger's lifetime or whatever preacher you may want to follow the line back through down all of these generations, but after all it has been a long time, and there have been some Sabbaths in which not much was being done by anybody, or any church in preaching the word. There have been times when everything was shut down by persecution and so it is that those weeks have been passing. How many of them one wonders have actually gone by.

Signs of the End Time

In Luke the 21st chapter, Jesus says some interesting things in this regard. In verse five, "Some spoke of the Temple, how it was adorned with goodly stones and gifts, He said, {6} "These things which you behold, the days will come, in which there shall not be left one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down." [7} And they ask Him, saying, "Master, but when shall these things be, and what sign will there be when these things will come to pass? {8} He said, "Take heed that you be not deceived, for many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ, and the time draws near, don't go after them. {9} But when you shall hear of wars and commotions, be not terrified for these things must first come the pass, but the end will not come immediately."

This is a funny thing, I grew up believing that one of the signs of the end was earthquakes in various places and wars and rumors of wars. Did you ever hear that sometime in the past?

Jesus said, "You are going to hear about that, but the end is not yet." And in fact, there has never been a generation of man when there haven't been earthquakes. There has never been a time of man when there haven't been wars and rumors of wars.

"Then He said to them," verse 10, "Nations shall rise against nations, and kingdoms against kingdoms. {11} And great earthquakes in various places, famines, pestilence and fearful sights and great signs shall there be from heaven, {12} But before all these, they shall lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues, and into prisons, being brought before kings and rulers for my name's sake. {13} And it shall turn to you for a testimony."

So persecution will come. Even before, a lot of the earthquakes, and wars that are going to be coming.

Verse 14, "Settle it therefore in your hearts, not to meditate before what you shall answer."

Now here is some rather useful things for those of us who are going to live out our lives under the shadow of the time of the end, because the signs are there, the things that could happen are there and the constant thought is there. One of us, in our generations, who look for Christ in our lifetime will be right.

First of all, He says, "Don't meditate in your heart what you're going to answer." Don't worry about that. If you're arrested, persecuted, put in the slammer, and because of what you are doing for me, {15}" I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which all your adversaries will not be able to gainsay or to resist. {16} And you shall be betrayed both by parents, brethren, kinsfolk and friends and some of you, they will cause to be put to death. {17} And you shall be hated of all men for my name's sake, {18} But there shall not a hair of your head perish."

Not a Hair on Your Head Will Perish

My goodness. Isn't that interesting. All of these terrible things are going to happen, but there will not a hair of your head perish. Well, folks, I was under the impression that a lot of people died for the faith down through the years. I've sort of been given the understanding that some of them were strapped against the stake with wood underneath and it was set on fire and they were burned to ashes. Hair and all. I sort of thought that happened.

What is Jesus talking about? One of two things. One of them is, that He may be talking about the fact that even though you go through all these things you will not perish, that is in the sense of being utterly and completely and finally lost. On the other hand, He may be talking about a category of people, who at the very end time, will be persecuted and drawn up before governors and kings for His name's sake and who will be given what to say at the time and not a hair of their head will perish. In other words, end time witnesses, who are called for a purpose, of going through some of these things.

Flee Into The Mountains

Jesus continues in Luke 21 "In your patience," {19} "possess you, your souls {20} And when you shall see Jerusalem compassed about with armies, then you know that the desolation of it is close, {21} Then let them which are in Judea flee into the mountains."

Over the years we have heard a lot of talk about fleeing from Pennsylvania or from Pittsburgh or from Houston. This Scripture says "Them who are in Judea flee into the mountains. and let them which are in the midst of it depart out, and don't let them that in the countries enter in."

It has to do with what's about to happen in Jerusalem.

Verse 22, "For these be the days of vengeance, that all things that are written may be fulfilled."

All of those prophecies in the Old Testament, about what was going to happen to Jerusalem, are going to come to pass at Jerusalem. If you are in that area, well, it will be well not to be in that area when these things start.

"But woe unto them" verse 23 "that are with child, and to them that give suck in those days, for there shall be great distress in the land, and wrath upon this people. {24} And they will 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. {25} And there should be signs in the sun, the moon and in the stars upon the earth, distress of nations, with perplexity, the sea and waves roaring. {26} Men's hearts failing them for fear, and looking after those things which are coming upon the earth, for the powers of the heaven shall be shaken."

That is what Pentecost is about. In the prophetic sense, this is what Peter said Pentecost was looking forward to, this day.

"Then," verse 27 "shall they see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. {28} When these things begin to come to pass, look up, lift up your heads, your redemption draws near."

I don't know how to feel about it. To live through this time, realizing that not a hair of your head was going to perish, it would have to be one of the most exciting times ever to be on the face of this earth. I don't know though that I want to see with my eyes what is going to be happening around me at that time. I am of two minds regarding so much of the things that we are talking about here.

Jesus said, "Look up, lift up your heads, your redemption draws near." I would think that with all the fear and the fright that's going on, the ability to know what God is doing would be the only thing that would stand between you and losing your mind.

Jesus spoke to them a parable, verse 29, "Behold the fig tree, and all the trees, {30} When they shoot forth, and you see and you know, in your own selves that summer is now near at hand. {31} So likewise when you see these things come to pass, know that the kingdom of God is near at hand, {32} Verily I say unto you, This generation (that is the generation that sees these things begin) shall not pass till everything is fulfilled."

Once it starts, it will pass, it will be finished in a generation.

{33} Heaven and earth may pass away, but my words shall not pass away. {34} And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting (that's overeating) and with drunkenness (that's over drinking) and the cares of this life, and that they come upon you unawares."

You know, this is really interesting, because it does not seem to suggest to us that simply by the study of prophecy and by knowing all these things about prophecy and having full understanding of the 1335 days, the 1260 days and the 360 day year, a day for a year. It doesn't even suggest that by knowing all of these things that you will avoid having this come upon you.

It says, "Beware lest your heart be overcharged with surfeiting, drunkenness and the cares of this life." Boy is that easy to do. Even if you manage to keep eating and drinking under control, the cares of this life are a bag in themselves to have to carry and keep track of and to know about. You can become so absorbed in them, and so distracted by them, that you miss what's going on around you.

Watch and Pray to Escape

Luke 21 verse 35, "For as a snare it will come upon all them that dwell upon the face of the whole earth. {36} Watch therefore, and pray always, that you may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass and to stand before the Son of Man."

Watch and pray that you may be accounted worthy, to, of all things escape. So there is such a thing as an escape after all. I think in years gone by we probably did a lot of harm with the old Petra doctrine.

For those of you who were never in the Worldwide Church of God, you may or may not know very much about what that was. But in years gone by, the church gave a great deal of emphasis to prophecy, a great deal of emphasis to end time events. Of course, we believed that we were living in the end time and we even got to the place to where we sort of backed into setting dates. It wasn't as though somebody came out and said, "Well Jesus didn't know what He was talking about, let's set a date." People started talking about it. It was such a simple thing, such an odd thing.

Mr. Herbert Armstrong saw a book entitled, "What the World Will Be Like in 1975." It will be a fabulous and wonderful utopia, with all of the scientific inventions and things that would make life great, so he decided to write a book entitled "1975 in Prophecy," in which he drew a scenario that he believed, that Christ would have returned by then and that by the time they got to 1975 they would be in the Day of the Lord when all of these terrible things would be coming down, and all illustrated with terrible gruesome pictures and so forth to impress that upon people's mind. He didn't really start out himself to set that as a date. He said it was a response to this book and he kind of felt that Christ's return would probably be before that time.

Well, once you put something like that in print, it takes on a life of its own and so the preachers and the membership all began to find all kinds of places in the Bible that would match up with 1975, so that you could back at 3 1/2 years from 1975, and you got to 1972. So 1972 became the year of the end of this age and the beginning of the Great Tribulation. Then other people began to find other things in prophecy to kind of work around it.

Then you can look at escape, and we thought it was talking about escape for a while, and then somebody made a trip to the place called Petra, which is down in southern Jordan. It is an old city down there and they wrote an article in the 'Good News' magazine about 'The Rose Red City of Petra' and somebody said "Wouldn't it be wonderful, if God would take us to a place like that and that took on a life of its own. So the first thing you know, people were talking about when we go to Petra and when we flee to a place of safety. There were whole doctrines and scenarios and ideas that got built up around it, that we were all going to flee and be taken to Petra and we would walk part of the way, go by ship part of the way or whatever it would be. I think that in later years the theory got to be that some of those abandoned DC-10's that were not in good shape, that God would protect us, and we would all fly there in DC-10's.

These ideas get going and they take on a life of their own. The fact is, though, that the approach that is taken out of the world going to get beat up really bad, but all of us, who are a part of this group, we are all going to move away. We are going to flee or be taken to a place of safety, a fortress, someplace in the wilderness like Petra. The fact is, and one of the problems with of all that is, it creates an atmosphere of fear, which gives to certain people who control the group, that will be going to the place of safety, control over the people who are in that group. And so that inclusion or exclusion from that group becomes a very powerful factor in and among the people who use it.

But, the fact that God will get you out, or that God will protect you in place is not cultic. It has nothing to do with somebody controlling you, or directing you.

God Is Our Refuge

Let's turn back to the 91st Psalm, a beautiful psalm, that has to do with people whom God loves and whom God cares about. There is after all a healthy fear, to read the Bible and to

believe prophecy and to know that we can't get from this world in which we are living today into the world to come without going through the time of the greatest trouble that has ever been on the face of this planet, ought to cause us a healthy kind of fear.

The 91st Psalm is a psalm about a people whom God loves and about a people for whom He cares and what He intends to do for them in a time of trouble.

"He that dwells in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. {2} I will say of the LORD, He is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in him will I trust."

It was a silly thing to allow the transfer of God as our rock to a city that had the name of a rock, Petra, that was supposed to be an impregnable fortress because you had this narrow defile that you had to go through to get there, but nobody bothered to mention that the backside of it was wide open. Anybody could come in from the backside of it, but the idea was a transfer away from God as our fortress and our refuge to Petra, which is a fortress and a refuge.

Continuing in verse 3, "Surely he shall deliver you from the snare of the fowler, and from the noisome pestilence. {4} He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you shall trust: his truth shall be your shield and buckler. {5} You shall not be afraid for the terror by night; nor for the arrow that flies by day; {6} Nor for the pestilence that walks in darkness; nor for the destruction that lays waste at noonday."

These are things that the prophets tell us in no uncertain terms from all the way from the earliest of Elijah to Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, the minor prophets, to Revelation. This type of thing is going to be coming down in spades at the very end time. All hell is going to break loose, but you don't have to be afraid of the disease epidemics. No need to be afraid of the wars, no need to be afraid of the destruction that lays waste at noonday.

Verse 7, "A thousand shall fall at your side, and ten thousand at your right hand; but it shall not come near you."

Now that's a promise to live with. It isn't a question of being away somewhere, it isn't a question of being tucked away in the wilderness. It isn't the question of being in Ayers Rock in Australia or being down there in Petra in Jordan. It says "A 1000 will fall at your side and 10,000 at your right hand, it will not come near you."

Verse 8, "Only with your eyes shall you behold and see the reward of the wicked."

How in the world can you see it if you are somewhere else, having been taken away.

Verse 9, "Because you have made the LORD, which is my refuge, even the most High, your habitation; {10} There shall no evil befall you, neither shall any plague come near your dwelling."

Now if you kind of figure that in years to come there are going to be plagues, if you kind of think that in years to come there are going to be some heavy serious wars. If you do feel that there was a lot of people dying of famine, then it might not be a bad idea to give some thought to what it means, to make God your refuge and the Most High your habitation.

Verse 11, "He shall give his angels charge over you, to keep you in all your ways. {12} They shall bear you up in their hands, lest you dash your foot against a stone."

This is the Scripture that the devil used concerning Christ, trying to tempt Him to do a display of His power of who He was. But it has to do with the person who is faithful to God, who makes God his refuge. God is his rock. God is his protector who hides him under the shadow of the Almighty who is under the feathers, as it were of God like a little chicken, under the feathers of a mother hen. This is the one who is in this range of protection.

Verse 13, "You shall tread upon the lion and adder: the young lion and the dragon shall you trample under foot. {14} Because he hath set his love upon me, therefore I will deliver him: I will set him on high, because he hath known my name."

Now isn't that something to think about. The reason why God protects a man, a woman, a child, is because he has set His love upon Him. To get from this world to the next, we must realize that those who have set their love on God can be protected. This is a tremendous encouragement.

Verse 15, "He shall call upon me, and I will answer him: I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him, I will honor him. {16} With long life I will satisfy him, and I will show him my salvation.

Pentecost

The feast of first fruits is a time that pictures, really in its own way, the resurrection from the dead, the harvest of the first fruits of the earth, that it is finished, that it's done, that we will move into God's kingdom. It has to do with our being harvested into God's own family and it's good to know, that during the last little transition into that period of time, which is a time which could be very frightening for all who are in the world. There can be for those who set their love on God a day of rest.

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