

NEWS WATCH FOR *the* CHURCH OF GOD

News in the world and church — to give warning and help for God's people — by Ron Weinland

February 1999

ESCAPE THE GREAT TRIBULATION

God's Church has always hoped to escape the great tribulation that will descend on this earth just prior to the return of Jesus Christ. No one likes to suffer and we certainly do not want our loved ones to suffer.

We have long known the kind of devastation and destruction that one day will come to pass. We are familiar with the prophecies that describe horrifying carnage. We are well aware of passages like Ezekiel 5 that speak of two-thirds of Israel being destroyed early in this tribulation. We are also aware that the last third will suffer mightily throughout this period, as death and destruction continue.

These are not pleasant things to contemplate. But now, after all these years, a stronger European Union is emerging before our eyes. Last month in *News Watch* we quoted a *Newsweek* article stating that what Charlemagne and his successors failed to achieve is now being accomplished by a single currency regime that will initially unite 11 European states more than ever before. As we pause and survey the economic conditions in this world, we know that someday the bubble will burst. Perhaps the catalyst will be a worldwide economic collapse that finally draws 10 kings together who will "give their power and strength to the beast" (Rev. 17:13). Regardless of what finally brings these kings together, we know that will be the time when great tribulation strikes.

TRIBULATION for the CHURCH?

Last month's *News Watch* addressed the lethargic state of the Church. The only way to reverse this ever weakening condition is in our willingness to admit our true state and repent of its cause. As we mentioned in that issue, "Perhaps one of the greatest signs that reveals the depth of weakness pervading the Church today is that many ministers and members alike are stuck in the physical."

Spiritual apathy within the Church of God is eroding the ability to grow in depth of understanding of God's Word and to exercise true discernment and sound judgment. Minds have become

so clouded and vision so dimmed that the spiritually obvious is escaping large numbers of brethren in the Body of Christ.

Let's build upon a case in point from last month. Much of the prophecy concerning the end of this age is dual, with both a physical and a spiritual fulfillment.

"For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of this world until this time, no, nor ever shall be. And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect's sake those days will be shortened" (Mat. 24:21-22).

We have always known there will be a physical fulfillment of this event, when God will have to intervene to prevent humanity from annihilating itself. But God is also going to have to intervene to save His elect. His purpose is to save a remnant of His elect out of those times. Jesus Christ is going to return to His temple. Much of that temple will have to be resurrected from the dead, but some of it will still be alive as part of the Body of Christ. The Church of God cannot be destroyed and must exist all the way up until His return. For the sake of His plan and purpose, God will intervene and save a remnant of the present-day Church.

Far too many brethren are missing the obvious and failing to recognize the true state of the Church. The end-time great tribulation is *already* upon the Church. Later it will come upon the world. Brethren are denying our true condition and therefore failing to address its cause. This leads to a failure to repent that in turn will keep us from being able to escape this tribulation. The vast majority of the present-day Church has already fallen.

The second chapter of 2 Thessalonians prophesies about today's Church. It reveals what would happen at the very end of this age, just before Jesus Christ returns. One of the very last things that had to occur before His return was a great falling away within the Church. We knew that time would come, and now it has! Sadly, some are still waiting for this to happen. As a result,

they are blind to the urgency of the times in which we live.

The height of this apostasy came after Mr. Joe Tkach, Sr., gave his infamous sermon in Atlanta on December 17, 1994. That sermon attacked the very core of beliefs that exist to give nurture, direction and vision to God's people. It sought to dismantle the Sabbath, Holy Days and the system of tithing. In the few months following that sermon, over two-thirds of the Church fell by the wayside. Of that total, nearly a third simply gave up all together. Approximately another third drifted back to traditional Christianity, from which God had earlier delivered them.

Brethren need to do the arithmetic. Just in your own area alone, stop and consider how many people have left the church you attended. How many simply gave up? How many have returned to traditional Christianity? How many are truly holding onto the commandments of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ? It is all the more sobering when we look at loved ones from old pictures of Spokesman Club, sporting events, picnics or other church activities.

We need to be watchful and pause to consider the potential meaning of what we have been experiencing and witnessing. Was the beginning of this end-time great tribulation upon the Church the very time when that destructive sermon was sent out to all congregations? The resulting magnitude of devastation that came upon the Church parallels the account of Ezekiel 5, which is yet to be fulfilled upon physical Israel. Isn't the initial loss of two-thirds of the Church worthy to be called a time of great tribulation?

Are we being watchful and understanding that the carnage is far from over? Some four years later, the Church continues to be scattered and dwindle in size. What will be left? Who will survive? The term *remnant* takes on new meaning for God's people.

When we think of the great tribulation, the period of three and a half years may come to mind. We may then conclude that since our experiences surpass that period of time that we could not be in the time called

the great tribulation. We may then disregard the relevance of these events and miss the spiritually obvious.

In times past we have tried to wrap everything into a neat package. We have often tried to place all references of three and a half years, or the time, times and half a time, or forty-two months, or 1260 day periods on top of each other, concluding that they are all one in the same. Don't be hasty! These are prophetic periods of time, but they do not all describe the same events.

There are other prophetic periods toward the end of this age that speak of seven years, or 1290 days, or 1335 days. We have always tried to understand all these events. But even as Daniel was told concerning some of these very times, "...the words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end" (Dan. 12:9). There are many reasons that all timing is not understood until or even after they have been fulfilled. We are to be watchful and weigh events by God's Word, because we do not know when and how all these events will be fulfilled. If we close our minds to obvious events, we will not be watching as we should.

News Watch has mentioned in past issues that one prophetic period may have been accomplished on the Sabbath preceding Pentecost this past year. Pentecost of 1998 may well have been the beginning of another phase of prophecy and perhaps the last phase before the great tribulation that will physically come on this world. Great tribulation on the Church can certainly occupy more than three and a half years. It may well be seven years or two prophetic periods of three and a half years. But whatever the time, we must be watchful and understand that now is a time for exercising judgment as never before in our lives. If you are not on the weekly mailing for taped sermons, you may want to request a current series that relates to the subject being covered in this issue of *New Watch*. That sermon series is titled "A Time For Judgment and God's Judgment."

Without preconceived ideas of how or when things at the end of this age are fulfilled, can we admit the obvious of what we have been experiencing in the Church? Are you going to be a part of the remnant that escapes this great tribulation? Is the continuing destruc-

tion real to you or are you still looking to the future when 2 Thessalonians will be fulfilled? Are you still waiting, as some are, for a scattering of God's people? Are you oblivious to the famine of God's Word that afflicts today's Church?

How much more of the Body of Christ must be weakened, splintered and destroyed before we as a people will awake to the reality that cries out to us from the carnage of fallen brethren?

WHERE IS THE LOVE OF GOD?

As Matthew 24 states, the love (Gk., *agape*) of many has waxed cold. This is one of the signs within the Church that Jesus Christ said would be fulfilled just before He returns. This statement about the waning of God's love is directed at the Church and the Church alone! The world does not have access to this kind of love, because it does not have access to God's Holy Spirit. Over the past few years, God's love has been disappearing from our midst. Brethren do not love one another as they should. How ironic, when of all people, we have the capacity to love one another with godly love.

The Passover itself is a witness against us and of our failure to yield ourselves to Jesus Christ living in us. As a people, we have become very weak and spiritually sick. Most pathetic of all is that so many are falling asleep. Over the years we have been failing to grasp the depth of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ for us, so that we might have access to His life living in us, thereby enabling us to love one another as God commands.

"And when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, 'Take, eat: this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me.' In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying 'This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.' For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes. Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread and drink of that cup. For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and

drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this cause many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep" (1 Cor 11:24-30).

At baptism and the laying on of hands, we entered a covenant relationship with Jesus Christ and God the Father. That covenant includes our desire to yield ourselves to His life dwelling in and through us. We entered into this agreement so that with the power of the Holy Spirit we might be able to confess or acknowledge, by and through our lives, the very life of God and Jesus Christ. Today many do not allow that life and power to dwell in them and thereby are working against the purpose of God for their lives. Brethren are actually working against the purpose of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, not only that we might be forgiven of our sins, but that we might be saved by His life living in and through us in the Body of Christ.

"Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life" (Romans 5:9-10, NKJ). We can be forgiven of sin and begin to have a relationship with God through the death of Jesus Christ. And then we can be saved by our very minds and lives being changed through receiving the *life* of Jesus Christ living in and through us.

When Jesus told the disciples about the coming of the Holy Spirit, He said, *"it will dwell with you and shall be in you."* He went on to say, *"I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you. Yet a little while, and the world sees me no more; but you see me: because I live, you shall live also. At that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you"* (John 14:18-20). These very scriptures that we read on Passover evening reveal what Jesus Christ said would begin to happen in the lives of all who are a part of the Body of Christ. It began on the day of Pentecost.

Too many do not understand what Jesus Christ meant when He said, *"I will come to you"* (verse 18). He was not speaking of His second coming! He was revealing what would shortly begin to happen on Pentecost in the Body of

Christ and would continue to happen over the following centuries each time someone had hands laid upon him and received the Holy Spirit. The expression "I will come to you" is not in future tense. In Greek it is present indicative, middle voice, somewhat like present progressive in English. It shows that Jesus Christ will come to us and continue coming to us in a present and ongoing way. In other words, once we are begotten of God He is going to live in and through us by the power of the Holy Spirit. He will make His dwelling or abode in us.

This is why Jesus went on to explain, *"If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home [abode] with him"* (Jn. 14:23, NKJ). *"Abide [Gk., dwell, live] in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing"* (John 15:4-5).

Jesus Christ suffered and died so that He and His Father might be able to dwell in us. This is the power that transforms our very minds and ultimately will save us. If we fail to yield ourselves to this, we take lightly the death and suffering of Jesus Christ. The result will be an inability to treat one another in the Body of Christ as we are commanded. In this two-fold way, we will not be rightly discerning the Body of Christ.

Discerning the Body of Christ is spiritually profound. We must grasp the magnitude of the purpose of Christ's sacrifice for us, so He can dwell in us to save us. And we must grasp the importance of His life dwelling in us to produce right relationships within the Body of Christ.

Let's go back and read those verses of 1 Corinthians from another translation, which gets to the heart and core of the problem. *"This can only mean that whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you are proclaiming the Lord's death until he comes again. So that, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord without proper reverence is sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. No, a man should thoroughly examine himself, and only then should he eat the bread*

or drink of the cup. He that eats and drinks carelessly is eating and drinking a condemnation of himself, for he is blind to the presence of the Body. It is this careless participation which is the reason for the many feeble and sickly Christians in your church, and the explanation of the fact that many of you are spiritually asleep" (1 Corinthians 11:26-30, Phillips translation).

ANTICHRIST

Brethren often find it hard to believe Jesus Christ's warning about *many* false ministers in the Church at the end, just before His return. It may be even harder to understand how the term *antichrist* could describe someone in the Church.

"Who is a liar but he that denies that Jesus is the Christ?" (1 Jn. 2:22). If we fail to yield ourselves to the life of Jesus Christ living in us, then we are liars. We are lying against God and the covenant we made. If we fail to yield ourselves to His life living in us, we are denying His purpose as our Messiah, who came to die for us and save us.

"Who is a liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist, who denies the Father and the Son. Whosoever denies the Son, the same has not the Father: Let that therefore abide [Gk., dwell, live] in you, which ye have heard from the beginning. If that which you have heard from the beginning shall remain [Gk., dwell, abide] in you, you also shall continue [Gk., dwell, abide, live] in the Son, and in the Father" (1 Jn. 2:22-24).

We are to confess or acknowledge by our lives that we are yielding to Jesus Christ dwelling in us. We should desire it with all our being! But what was John talking about when he spoke of that which we heard from the beginning should be dwelling in us?

This goes back to what he was saying at the beginning of the chapter. *"He who says, I know him, and keeps not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him"* (1 John 2:4). A person who professes a relationship with God but does not keep the commandments of God is a liar. The only way such a person can keep the commandments of God is by the life of Jesus Christ living in him. If he denies Christ and the Father so they cannot dwell in him, he is not keeping the commandments and is therefore a liar.

"But whoso keeps his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him. He who says he abides [Gk., dwells, lives] in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked. Brethren, I write no new commandment unto you, but an old commandment which you had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word which you have heard from the beginning" (1 Jn. 2:5-7).

What is this word that we have heard from the beginning? It is the most basic law of how man is to live his life. But he has failed and been unable to keep it. *"For this is the message [commandment] that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another"* (1 Jn. 3:11). It is an old commandment, but it is being made new through the new covenant. Now Jesus Christ can live in our lives and make this a reality. We will now be able to live it if we do not deny him but choose to continually yield ourselves to His life in us. *"Again, a new commandment I write unto you, which thing is true in him and in you: because the darkness is past, and the true light now shines"* (1 Jn. 2:8).

Could it be any clearer how we as God's people are going to be known? It will be revealed first and foremost by how we relate to one another in the Body of Christ. On Passover, we read these words of Jesus Christ: *"A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love [Gk., agape] one to another"* (John 13:34-35). Only those in the Body of Christ can experience the love of God. The world does not have access to it.

Hopefully we can now go on to gain a better understanding of God's love as revealed through the apostle John, even as he went on to give further instruction to the Church. *"And now I plead with you, lady, not as though I wrote a new commandment to you, but that which we have had from the beginning: that we love one another. This is love [Gk., agape], that we walk according to His commandments. This is the commandment, that as you have heard from the beginning, you should walk in it. For many deceivers have gone out into the world who do not confess Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist"* (2 Jn. 5-7).

This last verse lends itself to misunderstanding in a similar way as John 14:18. Those "who do not confess Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh" is not past tense. It is not a reference about some who may be questioning whether Jesus Christ came as a human being. In Greek, this word is a present passive participle, in middle voice. It is present and ongoing in nature. It is referring to brethren who "deny" or "confess not" the life of Jesus Christ dwelling in and through them. Being impregnated with God's Spirit is not enough. We must continually yield our lives to His life dwelling in us. This will be reflected in how we treat one another.

Again, this is not talking about people in the world, because they do not have the ability to yield themselves to the life of Jesus Christ dwelling in them. This has only been granted to those who are called and baptized into Jesus Christ. John is addressing the fact that there are deceivers who do not yield themselves to the life of Jesus Christ to be continually coming in their lives, in their flesh.

The love of God has waxed cold in the Church. False ministers abound and brethren find it difficult to discern what is true and what is not. Matters of doctrine and idolatry will be clearer to us when we relate to one another as John explained. *"My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth. And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him. For if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things. Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God. And whatever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight. And this is his commandment, that we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, as he gave us commandment. And he who keeps his commandments dwells in him, and he in him. And hereby we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit which he has given us"* (1 Jn. 3:18-24).

A REMNANT WILL ESCAPE

The Church has been decimated and the situation is not getting better. Most of this present-day Church has already

been destroyed. We are experiencing the end-time great tribulation. We should desire to escape and seek to be saved through it all. God called us so we could be saved at this time and be in the first great resurrection.

Many have been deceived and many have been conquered. People have been so physically minded that they have been blindsided by events of recent years. Too many have had a greater focus on being saved physically in a place of safety from a physical tribulation than they have of being saved spiritually and escaping this great tribulation on the Church. Do you think God is more concerned with saving our physical hides than He is about saving our spiritual lives? Which is more important? Where is your focus? Yes, too many are stuck in the physical. Is it any wonder that relationships are suffering? Is it any wonder we haven't been grasping the depth of the meaning of Passover as we should?

As a people, we have not lived faithfully before God. Matthew 25 reveals that we have all either slumbered or slept. We were not faithful to the charge of being spiritually alert and watchful, nor of being ready for the bridegroom's coming. We must repent and seek God's favor and help so we may be a part of the remnant who will live as the bride that makes herself ready.

The choice is ours. Will we humble ourselves and cry out to God for deliverance? God promises to bring a remnant through this tribulation and for the elect's sake He will even cut it short. *"And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be delivered: for in mount Zion and in Jerusalem shall be deliverance, as the Lord hath said, and in the remnant whom the Lord shall call"* (Joel 2:32, KJV).

Jesus Christ gave us the kind of instruction we must heed regarding this time of tribulation. After describing the tribulation to the disciples, He said, *"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, KJV). In the Greek, the word translated as "watch" means "to keep awake, to abstain totally from sleep." We are to be spiritually alert. We can only do that through the means

described in this issue of *News Watch*. In order to be saved we must yield ourselves to the life of Jesus Christ dwelling in us. Only by His life dwelling in us may we be accounted worthy to escape and stand before Him at His return. NW

NEWS WATCH of the WORLD

Keep your eyes on the global economy. As it changes, so will the face of this world, especially that of a new Europe rising!

As with a year ago, we were told to keep our eyes on Asia. Keep them there again, because conditions there have not improved, but only worsened!

The economic world is teetering back and forth. Right now it appears to be leveling off a little, somewhat like the lull before the storm. When will panic hit again? We may not know when, but we know it will happen again, just like it did last August.

A report from the Asian Wall Street Journal today (2/8) stated, *"Japanese banks may have outstanding loans to Chinese borrowers five times more than officially disclosed. Some of the lenders are reviewing loans, looking for technical reasons to declare them in default and accelerate repayment. Banks all but stopped renewing maturing loans and refused to grant new ones to companies and governments across China in the wake of the October collapse of the nation's second-biggest finance company."*

"How Long Can Beijing Hang Tough?" is the title of an article in the February 8 issue of Business Week. It addresses fears that China is coming under increased pressure to devalue the yuan.

It continues by saying that the January 10 bankruptcy of Guangdong International Trust has spooked foreign lenders. *"So international bankers are calling in some of their loans in China early, refusing to roll over others, and balking at lending new money."*

"The fear is that even a modest devaluation could trigger a worldwide panic, wipe out fragile Asian recovery, and send the U.S. trade deficit soaring."