

NEWS WATCH FOR *the* CHURCH OF GOD

News for the scattered Church of God—by Ron Weinland

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THIS IS THE END TIME! Pt. 1

A person recently sent me a sermon tape given by a minister in one of the larger organizations who mocked the idea that we are now in the end of the age. If anyone in the scattered Church of God fails to truthfully acknowledge our recent history and the troubles we are still experiencing as a Church, then they will not understand that we are indeed IN the end of this age.

Failure to understand the time we now live in will result in a very negative spiritual condition. We are without excuse! Every one of us in the Body of Christ should know the time in which we are living. If we believe we are indeed the true Church of God (all who have the impregnation of God's Holy Spirit—who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ in their lives), then we should be able to easily acknowledge the truths about our history over the past 80 years. The events of this period of time reveal more fully that we are indeed God's Church at the end of this age.

Nearly a third of the Bible is prophetic, and the vast majority of prophecy is about this time in which we are living. The Church has been in the midst of fulfilling a great deal of prophecy that focuses on end-time events that lead into a final time of great physical tribulation that is about to come upon this whole world. This article is going to focus on seven specific areas of scripture that prove we are IN the end of this age. This News Watch series compliments a recent sermon series that covers this very subject. Although many readers of News Watch have heard this series, it is important for everyone to grasp this subject as fully as they possibly can.

The more clearly you see and are able believe the truth of who we are and where we are in time, the greater your spiritual strength can become, the stronger your faith can be, and the better prepared you will be for the traumatic times that are just ahead of us.

Failure to acknowledge scriptural proof that we are in the end of this age will result in brethren drifting farther into spiritual sluggishness and sleep. This kind of blindness causes people to grasp at false security. Too many find it more comfortable to trust in lies concerning the Church. Such lies include the false teaching that this is a time of growing peace within the Church—a time when people are successfully regrouping and are once again working together in harmony after the terrible things they have recently experienced in the Worldwide Church of God. If you know that this is the end of this age, then you will know that such teaching is false and only works to move brethren farther away from performing the things they are supposed to be doing.

If you believe the words of God concerning the end of the age, just before the Kingdom of God comes to this earth, then you will know that you are living in that very time. You will believe Him when He tells you that this is a time of mourning, lamentation and woe. You will believe Him when He condemns the lie about now being a time of peace and safety. Any minister or organization that distracts brethren from what is true is fighting against God and the power of God's spirit that should be leading into greater understanding, truth and faith.

Although brethren throughout the ages have been able to profit spiritually from many scriptures that focus on the warnings and admonitions that refer to a very specific time at the end, those same scriptures are nevertheless focused on very specific events that do occur at the end-time. This article will be reviewing some of those scriptures. One example that fits very closely to what we just touched upon in the previous paragraph is found in 1 Thessalonians. *"But of the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I write unto you. For yourselves know perfectly that the day of*

the Lord so comes as a thief in the night. For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction comes upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape. But you, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief. You are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober" (1 Thes. 5:1-6). This is much needed instruction at this time! If we are indeed following the lead of God's spirit, we will be in the light—able to understand the truth that there is a great thrust within the environs of the Church that deceitfully seeks to persuade people that now is a time of peace and safety.

Ezekiel records some very pointed words regarding what God has to say about ministers who seek to persuade brethren that times are positive concerning the Church—portraying a picture of peace, positive growth and safety within their fellowship. *"Have ye not seen a vain vision, and have ye not spoken a lying divination, whereas ye say, The LORD says it; albeit I have not spoken? Therefore thus says the Lord GOD; Because ye have spoken vanity, and seen lies, therefore, behold, I am against you, say the Lord GOD. And mine hand shall be upon the prophets that see vanity, and that divine lies: they shall not be in the assembly of my people, neither shall they be written in the writing of the house of Israel, neither shall they enter into the land of Israel; and ye shall know that I am the Lord GOD. Because, even because they have seduced my people, saying, Peace; and there was no peace,"* (Ez. 13:7-10).

Lies turn brethren away from understanding. Our ability to understand where we are in time will help stir up a greater sense of urgency in our lives which will in turn can help move us to draw closer to God, become more

spiritually alert and better prepared for the difficult times yet ahead. Faith and confidence are multiplied when we trust more fully in the word of God—when we believe those things that are fulfilled in our lives exactly as He said they would be.

1st Area of Proof

All seven areas of scriptural proof that we will focus upon in this *News Watch* series have been covered in the sermon series on this same subject. If you have not heard these sermons, it is recommended that you request the tapes that cover this series. Even if you have already heard them, it would be wise for you to review those areas again as they are covered in this article, because the more deeply we grasp this material, the greater our confidence and faith will become. This is essential to each of us in order for us to become stronger, enabling us to approach the troubled times ahead with boldness.

These areas of scriptural proof that we are in the end of this age are by no means the only areas of scripture that prove where we are at this time, but they are some of the most complete and important areas we need to understand. You need to also be aware that some of these areas of scripture contain many proofs by themselves.

The first area of proof is contained in a parable. This parable has lessons that have been valuable for brethren in the Church ever since it was given, but it contains information that applies even more fully to the time in which we are now living. This area of scripture is contained in Matthew 25 in the parable of the ten virgins.

As we discuss each area of proof, this article will focus on important points that need to stand out in our understanding. This article is not meant to be exhaustive in covering each area of scripture, because that is done more fully in the sermon series.

It should first be noted in this parable concerning the virgins that all ten were guilty of failure to perform what they were supposed to be doing. Although the wise virgins had been more fully prepared by seeking God's spirit in their lives (the oil), they failed

to use it as God had intended. They did exactly what the foolish did at a time that was spiritually critical for them. They all slumbered and slept. Because of pride, there are far too many brethren who have a difficult time admitting that this is exactly what happened in the Church.

We are all guilty of having slumbered or slept. Are you able to admit that this happened in your life? If this did not happen in the Church—if the Church was not spewed out of God's mouth because of this very condition—then perhaps the Church has not really been scattered. If we are truthful with God and with ourselves, then we should be able to admit the obvious—but many can't! And for any who can't, they won't want to see the other six areas of proof, because they do not seek to reconcile nor understand the agreement the word of God has with who we are and the times we have been living through during our recent history.

The Church came to a time when it had to be awakened because brethren were either in the process of drifting off to sleep or were already fast asleep. A prophetic and powerful event occurred in the Church (which will be covered in another area of proof) that worked to awaken some of the Church. It was an event prophetically marked by an apostasy—an apostasy that moved from the peak of leadership and fulfilled a scripture that points to this very time as being a revelation for the Church that Jesus Christ is now coming. Before this occurred, Paul recorded that the coming of Jesus Christ could not occur until this astounding event first happened to the Church. It is a CRY that went out to the entirety of the Church, but not all of the Church had ears to hear, because their sleep had become too great.

When people are tired and drowsy, they gradually begin falling to sleep or go to sleep quickly. When told to awaken after first falling into this condition, it is much more difficult to respond. Some are able to wake up immediately, while others simply roll over and continue in their sleep. For the Church, this process of falling

asleep and being awakened took place over several years. Even though some woke up earlier and some are still in the process of being awakened, there was a very specific time for the Church when the "cry" was more climatic.

Regardless of the timing, the Church did begin to fall asleep in the mid 80's and began to be awakened throughout the 90's with the strongest part of the cry occurring in the mid 90's. We have lived through this time and should be able to easily see ourselves in this parable.

A cry went out to all the Church that the bridegroom was coming, that now was not the time to fall asleep, but NOW was the time to make ourselves ready! We are to be preparing ourselves more fully than ever for the soon-coming Kingdom of God—the return of Jesus Christ.

Our sad history and continuing response to this great cry are that most did not choose to respond, but preferred to remain asleep. Far too many, who did at first respond by being awakened have now started the process all over again—drifting back to sleep or asleep already. This is not the time to allow that to happen again, but this is the time to be making ourselves ready for the soon-coming of the bridegroom. We are to be alert, watchful and on guard! That is the opposite of drifting off to sleep!

Those who properly respond to God's cry will be drawing closer to Him now than ever before in their lives. They will become more alert to the danger and pull of becoming lukewarm and spiritually sluggish. They will have a renewed zeal toward God and His plan and purpose for us. Then, when the bridegroom comes, when brethren have made themselves ready, they will be able to go in with Him to the marriage.

"And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom comes; go you out to meet him" (Mat. 25:6). We have been living through the time of midnight upon the Church when sleep has overtaken us. The task before us now is to seek to be fully awake—watchful—and making ourselves ready for the coming of God's Kingdom to this earth.

The parable does not say that only the wise would be able to respond and make themselves ready. To respond properly to God, both the wise and foolish must repent and do what God has called us to do—seek the Kingdom of God, watch and make ourselves ready. We have not always been doing that! That is why we must all repent. The good news, for those who have not applied themselves in the past by seeking to fill their lives with the oil from God, is that they can begin doing so upon repentance—just as much as the wise who must also repent of not properly using that oil to make themselves ready. All those among the wise and foolish who properly respond to God's cry to awake and make themselves ready to meet the bridegroom will be able to go into God's Kingdom at the return of Jesus Christ. *"And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut"* (Mat. 25:10)

Although Matthew 25 is a generalized story in the form of a parable, it never-the-less focuses upon a very specific time just before the return of Jesus Christ, and it tells of the condition of the Church at this critical time in history toward the close of 6,000 years of mankind upon the earth. Do you believe we are those people at that very specific time? If not, then who are you and where does the Church fit into the timing of prophesied events that occur just before God's Kingdom comes?

2nd Area of Proof

The next area of scriptural proof that we are in the end of this age is found in the preceding chapter in Matthew 24. This chapter begins with the account of Jesus walking with His disciples around the area of the Temple in Jerusalem. As Jesus turned their attention to the temple, He said that the time would come when there would not be one stone left on another which would not be thrown down.

The conversation had evidently sparked a strong, inquisitive response from the disciples because they asked what would be the sign of his coming

and the end of this age. They had no concept that nearly 2,000 years would pass before this would happen, since they believed he would come into Jerusalem to rule during their lifetime.

The fact that these questions were a response to what Jesus had earlier told them, concerning the stones of the temple being cast down, reveals that the conversation was directed to events that would lead up to Jesus Christ coming as King of kings. He began to tell them about the events that would lead up to His coming. He concluded His remarks to them by saying, *"And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other"* (Mat. 24:30-31). And the previous verses show what would happen at the end just before His return.

In the last few years of his life, Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong was given understanding that Jesus Christ was not going to return to a physical temple, but to a spiritual one which is the Church. He made it clear that a physical temple was not going to be rebuilt so that Jesus Christ could return to it. He made those statements because that is what some professing Christians believe must first happen before He can return. There were also people in the Worldwide Church of God who believed that a physical temple had to be built, and Mr. Armstrong wanted to make clear that Jesus Christ was returning to a spiritual temple.

The minister referred to in the beginning of this article recently gave a sermon mocking the belief that the statements made here in Matthew 24 could have anything to do with the state of the Church today or that we could be in the end-time. He spoke of a physical temple that had to first be built in Jerusalem. Where was this minister when Mr. Armstrong began to correct such false notions? He was a church pastor, but he failed to grow

with the Church. Such notions should have been dispelled long ago.

Because of our experiences in the past few years, it should be abundantly clear that Jesus Christ was speaking of a spiritual temple and the events that were going to happen at the very end of this age, just before He returned. We have been experiencing those events Jesus Christ told His disciples about when they asked Him the sign of His coming and the end of this age. The notion that a physical temple must be rebuilt should be foolishness to us.

The Bible also speaks in other terms describing the same end-time events upon the Church just prior to the Kingdom of God coming to this earth. Many prophesies speak of a scattering with only a remnant remaining. Revelation describes a time when the Church would be spewed out of God's mouth—the result being the same when speaking of a scattering of the Church. Jesus was describing a time when the stones of the temple would be thrown down. We have been experiencing these events. We have been living through the pain and suffering of such events.

Mr. Armstrong was filled with purpose and understood the commission that God gave to him, which was contained in these end-time events being spoken of by Jesus Christ. *"And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come"* (Mat. 24:14). Mr. Armstrong was zealously focused on accomplishing this verse. It was given to him to fulfill—not to any individual or group living today. God opened doors for Mr. Armstrong to visit with numerous world leaders in the last several years of his life. A righteous God was accomplishing a great purpose by showing that even in the end of this age, with all the advancements, sophistication and technology of mankind, man would still be the same and leaders would still reject God. This is indeed a witness against them.

The same account recorded in Mark also makes it clear that God intended that there be a witness against world leaders in the end-time. *"..and you shall be brought before rulers and*

kings for my sake, for a testimony [same Gk. word as "witness" in Mat. 24:14] *against them. And the gospel must first be published* [Gk.- proclaimed] *among all nations"* (Mk. 13:9-10). These verses specifically apply to a commission God gave to Mr. Armstrong and the Philadelphian era to fulfill. Some either do not think that it was given to him to fulfill or that he did not finish doing it, and therefore, others must finish accomplishing it.

If you have not received the sermon tapes that describe the fulfillment of these verses and its effect upon the Church over the past couple of decades, you can request the sermon series, "The Work of God and the Gospel."

Why can't pastors and church leaders admit or acknowledge that these verses have indeed been fulfilled? If we are able to agree with the truth of this fulfillment, then we will better understand the battles before us today, and we will understand more fully what our focus should be, just as much as Mr. Armstrong and the Church understood what their focus was when Matthew 24:14 was being fulfilled. That time is now past! We are now deep into the time of Matthew 24:15. Grasping the reality of how far we are in completing the fulfillment of verse 15 should sober us deeply and stir up an incredibly strong sense of urgency on our part—an urgency that is sadly lacking in the Church today.

"When you therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place, (whoso reads, let him understand:) Then let them which be in Judaea flee into the mountains:" (Mat. 24:15-16).

Our very experience over the past few years ought to loudly proclaim the obvious fulfilling of these two verses. Daniel speaks of an abomination in the temple. When we understand that the temple Jesus Christ is speaking of is a spiritual one, we should easily grasp that the abomination occurs within the spiritual temple of God, the Church of God, and works to produce desolation. How much of the Church still remains today? How long will leaders and

pastors continue to refuse the obvious? The Church has been suffering horrible destruction.

These verses are telling us that when we see these forces at work in our midst that we are to flee. We are to flee for our spiritual lives. These are indeed fearful times. When the power of desolation began to grow in the Worldwide Church of God, brethren began to flee into different organizations seeking a safe haven. People wanted to escape the falling away that was beginning to destroy so much of the Church.

What some do not seem to fully recognize today is that this power of desolation upon the Church was not confined to one organization called the Worldwide Church of God. This power spilled over into many groups producing a massive scattering over many years. Most of the destructive power upon the Church has come through ministers who failed to repent when they moved from one organization to another. They carried their false ideas and/or hypocritical lifestyles into other organizations and perpetuated the process of destruction upon the Church. All organizations have experienced this. Who can deny this is true? These false ministers began to teach false doctrines in their church areas and more brethren fell victim. This is still going on!

Other false ministers have been lulling brethren back to sleep because their sermons no longer have the inspiration of God working in them. They have grown weak through disobedient and hypocritical lives. When ministers begin living a lie—preaching one thing but living another—they quench God's spirit. When they begin to teach false doctrine they also quench God's spirit. Unsuspecting brethren may like the individual but not recognize the slow decay that works through their weak, empty sermons. Such sermons become increasingly shallow and generic in nature.

Some brethren have seen these destructive forces at work in organizations or with local ministries and find that they must flee again to another organization, or another

church area in the same organization, in order to escape and seek refuge. This process is still very much at work within the Church. How can anyone deny it? How can any deny that this is indeed the fulfillment of a very specific end-time event. If we know these things, we will also come to more deeply understand that we do not have much time left until all the words of Jesus will be fulfilled as well as His return to establish His Kingdom. We are in the very end of this age! The proof is overwhelming! But most continue to refuse that very proof which is witnessed in their lives through their experiences within the Church. Are we going to be faithful witnesses of those events?

Ask God for Help

In this article, we have only covered two areas of proof that we are in the end of this age. As we proceed through all seven areas of proof, you should be able to grasp a greater sense of urgency about the how fast time is running out for the Church and for the world—just before Jesus Christ comes. We must be making ourselves ready as both Matthew 24 and 25 instruct us. Read the entirety of these chapters.

As you begin to see the overwhelming content of so many areas of proof and instruction that God has given us concerning these very times we are in, you will be moved with greater awe and a vivid sense of reality of the times we are about to enter. Ask God for help to understand what is true concerning these matters. It is only by God's spirit living in us—leading us, guiding us and revealing truth to us that we will be able to grasp His words.

God loves us, and He will help us to be fully prepared for what lies ahead. The pangs of labor are going to become more intense and more rapid before Jesus Christ finally returns. Don't you want to be prepared? This series will help you do just that!