

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 1998

DANGEROUS TIMES

We live in one of the most tumultuous times in history for God's Church. As Paul spoke of our time, *"This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come"* (II Timothy 3:1). Paul said that these times would be dangerous for God's people.

But WHO believes it? Do you? If so, why? How deep do your convictions run? Do you really see the dangers that we are living through? How real are they to you? That is what *News Watch* is all about. Its purpose is to keep you informed and mindful of those things for which you should be spiritually watchful.

Another admonition given by Paul should jump out at us at this time. These words could not ring truer than they do for right now, today! *"Therefore let us not sleep as do others; but let us watch and be sober"* (I Thessalonians 5:6).

The sad reality is there seem to be very few who really believe these times are dangerous for them spiritually. One can't help but be reminded of what was discussed in last month's *News Watch* regarding the warnings of Ezekiel 5. It isn't hard to believe that only a tithe will remain of the last third of the church that has been scattered.

The possibility of such a scenario should send chills up and down our spine. But there are too many who don't believe we live in times that are quite that dangerous for God's people. It is high time for us to WAKE UP (Ephesians 5:14-18)! How many have to go by the wayside before we finally face reality? As was mentioned last month, two thirds have already left!

Where is the shock? Where is the horror? Where is the lamenting for brothers and sisters who are no longer with us? Where is the sighing and crying for what has happened in our midst?

LAMENTATIONS

Lamentations prophesies well of our attitude. We have become hardened and dull of hearing. As God's people,

we have much for which we must repent. But who really believes that? Not many!

Let's look at what Lamentations has to say. *"How the gold has lost its luster, the fine gold become dull! The sacred gems are scattered at the head of every street. How the precious sons of Zion, once worth their weight in gold, are now considered as pots of clay, the work of a potter's hands"* (NIV, Lamentations 4:1-2)! The church has become dull in every way, especially dull of hearing. We are no longer bright lights reflecting the ways of our God to the sick world around us. Indeed, the *"sacred gems"* (NIV), or as *The Living Bible* states it, *"the inlaid Temple walls"* are scattered. *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* states, *"the precious sons of Zion... have been thrown out like broken pottery and lie scattered.."* In Daniel 12:7, the Hebrew word for "scattering" means *"to beat in pieces"* or *"to shatter"* like a piece of pottery (Psalms 2:9). God's people are NOT what they used to be. Our condition is deteriorating rapidly!

"Even the jackals feed their young, but not my people, Israel. They are like cruel desert ostriches, heedless of their babies' cries. The children's tongues stick to the roofs of their mouths for thirst, for there is not a drop of water left. Babies cry for bread but no one can give them any" (NIV, Lamentations 4:3-4).

There are very few ministers who are genuinely feeding the church as shepherds should. Too many are busy painting false pictures of "peace and safety." Instead of openly helping brethren deal realistically and soberly with the trials before them, many focus on the facade of how much is being accomplished in "the work." Circulation numbers and membership rolls seem to carry a greater importance.

Some ministers are becoming so complacent that there is no zeal and excitement for preaching the Word of God. Sermons become stale and stagnant. Still others are trying to strengthen their hold on the

congregations they are supposed to be "serving and leading," instead of "ruling and controlling!"

Brethren starve while many of the shepherds, like the ostrich, are sticking their head in the sand and not hearing the cries of the flock. They are not tuned into the real needs of the brethren.

"Those who used to eat fastidiously are begging in the streets for anything at all. Those brought up in palaces now scratch in garbage pits for food. For the sin of my people is greater than that of Sodom, where utter disaster struck in a moment without the hand of man" (TLB, Lam. 4:5-6).

GARBAGE PITS

We have passed the time of feasting on an overabundance of spiritual food. Most of the church now suffers famine because of the condition of the ministry. When God's people are hungry and not being fed, they will go out in search of food. Unfortunately, unsound doctrines abound and too many are unwittingly feeding in "garbage pits" (some translations, more graphically, call them "dung hills").

Brethren are becoming easy prey to charlatans, false ministers, and crackpots who are only making merchandise of them. One of the primary purposes of *News Watch* is to warn brethren and expose these kinds of dangers to God's scattered flock.

The church is being bombarded with perverse teachings, as with the time for the observance of Passover. Within the scattered groups, some are described as "14-15ers" and "15ers." People get into incredible arguments over this date, yet the 14th is the only time for Passover to be observed. Where is the fear from tampering with such an important event like Passover. The clear example of when Jesus Christ observed it doesn't seem to stir much fear in those who question it.

Others flirt with various groups as though they are going to bring these people into the church or learn from them how to better serve God. *What*

foolishness!!! Have we forgotten our calling and how God Works in our lives?

If you are not on our tape program, but would like to hear more on this subject, you may request the sermon series that covers this subject (*How God Works In our Lives*). They examine how God's Spirit works in us, how He leads us, and how others are preaching against this process.

Some seem to think they can learn from others or convert others simply because they observe the same day of the week as we do. It doesn't seem to matter that they speak in tongues, keep Christmas, reject the Holy Days, or are steeped in O.T. rituals that seem to give greater credibility to their spirituality.

Have we forgotten how God opens our minds and teaches us? Do we believe we can flirt with such groups that are considered friends of the Sabbath and not get hurt? Do we believe we can "pet" or fornicate "just a little" with others, going against God's instructions? Maybe we should go back and meditate, especially on the spiritual intent of these scriptures: *Lev. 20:6-8, Deu. 18:9, Prov. 29:3, Hosea 4:6-11, II Cor. 11:3-4, Gal 1:6-9, and Rev. 2:20.*

GOING BACK TO SLEEP

The church is falling asleep. To wake up and respond to God requires soul searching on our part, followed by deep repentance. Until we are willing to face reality and admit what we are, we too, are going to become more like the proverbial ostrich and bury our head deeper in the sand.

Do you SEE that you are in a fight for survival? And fight you must!!! Things are that serious for the church. The attitude of complacency and pride is so strong that most ministers would play down such words as these and paint a picture that is much more placid. ---After all, aren't we beginning to get things straightened out and going forward better than ever?.

Since the Feast last year, the spiritual attack against the church has been increasing at an alarming rate. That attack shows no signs of

dissipating. On the contrary, there are numerous signs that show it is increasing. That should scare us to our core!

The spiritual condition of the church is becoming so weak that conditions which should shock us are ignored. How much louder, more pointed, and forceful must events become before we heed? One can almost hear the frustration in prophecies that describe the attempt by a loving God to *reach out* and warn His people. But who hears? Too many don't want to hear!

Do we have a duty to help warn others? If one warns only from duty or is motivated by self-righteousness, they will only do damage and come across as pushy and obnoxious. But if someone is motivated out of genuine love, God's love in them, a warning can be more easily received.

ONE AT A TIME

Can you do more to help or encourage brethren you love to become more watchful and alert? That is the hope and objective of *News Watch*. We hope to reach out and give help to the one in ninety-nine who can hear. Others are concentrating on serving the ninety-nine. Both efforts are needed. Hopefully, all can one day work more closely together.

For now, we encourage you to use *News Watch* as a tool to reach out and help others, encourage others, and move others to hold onto the truth once delivered. We encourage you to share these publications with others.

The other day, my wife read me a story out of *Chicken Soup for the Soul* written and compiled by Jack Canfield and Mark Hansen. This story comes from page 23 and is titled, *One At A Time*.

"A friend of our was walking down a deserted Mexican beach at sunset. As he walked along, he began to see another man in the distance. As he grew nearer, he noticed that the local native kept leaning down, picking something up and throwing it out into the water. Time and again he kept hurling things out into the ocean.

As our friend approached even closer, he noticed that the man was picking up starfish that had been

washed up on the beach and, one at a time, he was throwing them back into the water.

Our friend was puzzled. He approached the man and said, "Good evening, friend. I was wondering what you are doing."

"I'm throwing these starfish back into the ocean. You see, it's low tide right now and all of these starfish have been washed up onto the shore. If I don't throw them back into the sea, they'll die up here from lack of oxygen."

"I understand," my friend replied, "but there must be thousands of starfish on this beach. You can't possibly get to all of them. There are simply too many. And don't you realize this is probably happening on hundreds of beaches all up and down this coast. Can't you see that you can't possibly make a difference?"

The local native smiled, bent down and picked up yet another starfish, and as he threw it back into the sea, he replied, "Made a difference to that one!"

We should all be working to make a difference in the Body of Christ! And we can *one at a time!*

TAKE COURAGE

Compare these verses with what we read in Lamentations. Think about their current, spiritual application to the church.

"Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries that are coming upon you! Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten. Your gold and silver are corroded, and their corrosion will be a witness against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have heaped up treasure in the last days. Indeed the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out; and the cries of the reapers have reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth. You have lived on the earth in pleasure and luxury; you have fattened your hearts as in a day of slaughter. You have condemned, you have murdered the just; he does not resist you. Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the

precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and later rain. You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand" (NKJ, James 5:1-7).

What value do you place on helping someone stay the course?

"Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins" (NKJ, James 5:19-20).

We all have sin and we all need the help and encouragement of one another! NW

NEWS WATCH of the Church

With this edition of *News Watch of the Church*, we are going to focus on two areas where we need to be watchful.

One area of concern is the mounting attack against sound truths that God revealed to us when we were first called. We are going to look at an article that recently appeared in *The Journal* and point out some of the subtleties to which we all need to become more alert.

In the second part of this section, we are going to focus on the rise in spirit activity. The spirit world is becoming increasingly active and we need to be aware of this trend. We need to be alert, not only for ourselves, but for our children.

EAST COAST REBELLION

The *Journal* of January 30, 1998 carried an article beginning on page 11 titled, "Ken Wesby talks about the 'East Coast Rebellion' of 1974."

Deception and perverse subtlety is becoming more prevalent in sermons and articles and brethren are being deceived. A common ploy used by those who deceive (whether or not they are aware of it), is to get readers or listeners to agree to several points, then slip in a distortion or an outright lie. This is being done too frequently in some of the sermons that are being sent around to many of the scattered brethren. Learn to be more watchful in this area, *proving everyone* to whom you listen. Each of us has this

responsibility. We shouldn't become paranoid, but we must exercise wisdom and have a sense of accountability.

The example I will cite in this article is common and hopefully the fallacy it espouses is obvious to God's people. However, some arguments are far more cunning and deceitful.

Brethren who have experienced many injuries and injustices over the past several years may be more open to the points Ken Wesby makes in this article. This, however, is what makes them become easy prey and fall into the traps I have described.

Brethren often feel a bond of compassion and empathy when reading an article like this. Then, if they're not careful, they may actually consider the distortions presented as plausible and have some merit.

The following text is taken from the article about Ken Wesby in *The Journal*, page 26.

"But I know a lot of Sunday-keepers who worship God as Creator and worship Him as Savior. But for some reason--because of background, teaching, closed mind, whatever--they don't understand the Sabbath.

Do they lose anything? Of course. They lose the benefit that can come only through understanding the historical, actual time reality and continuity from creation, to Christ to the present, to the millennial Sabbath. The Sabbath enshrines in time His presence as Creator and Savior. They lose that, and more.

But some, I would have to say, are in line with the Sabbath principle, even though they're not aligned with the actual time representation of it. They lose much of that, but I think God looks at their heart and then will judge them as such. While some of us used to say they had the mark of the beast, I don't believe that now.

But the Sabbath-keeping Churches of God have taught that these people's minds are not open; they're not even held accountable for their ignorance of the Sabbath; they will learn about the Sabbath in the second resurrection.

Yeah, can you be a Christian and keep Sunday? In other words, would God grant you salvation even though

you're ignorant about the right day of the week, are wrong on a doctrine?

Then you have to ask, well, how many doctrines do you have to be savvy on and still be saved? And then you've got to come up with a number. But then you're going to have to ask the question: Well, what then is required for salvation? How many doctrines do you have to have right? Which ones? Do all doctrines carry the same weight?

You'd better watch out because you might find that you don't need any doctrines right to be saved except if you make this a doctrine: that Jesus is Lord and Savior and that you can be saved by His sacrifice: Believe in Him and you shall be saved."

My personal memories don't completely reflect the stories told in this article, although I have no doubt there were injustices. But let's face reality! If a minister has this kind of belief, does he really have any place in the ministry of God's Church?

The concept of salvation espoused in this article is simply what is taught by traditional Christianity.

Can a fountain spew out both good water and bitter? Perhaps we need to check James 3 again.

Please be careful! There are some pretty popular ministers out there, working with large groups of brethren, who are beginning a subtle shift to this same philosophy or other related philosophies.

SPIRIT ACTIVITY

Over the past couple of years, there has been a heightening of activity in the spirit world. The movie industry has a growing fascination with the spirit world. There is a marked increase in spiritual activity in many churches where more of the bazaar is being manifested. There is also an increase in experiences of encounters with the "third kind".

Some of these things may seem innocent and often people have difficulty grasping any connection with a spirit world. But flirting and experimenting with some of these things can have devastating results.

A recent movie, *Fallen*, is quite direct. Listen to some of the plot given by a recent review. "Detective John

Hobbes is convicted that when killer Edgar Reese is executed, all of his troubles are over. But when people he knows on the street start to sing the same tune that Reese sang in the gas chamber, and those same people taunt him, he is told that maybe the cursed fallen angel Azazel is behind it all. Azazel is cursed to roam the Earth without a form, and he can switch bodies by any contact, making him hard to track."

We need to be more alert to these trends, especially for our children's sake. This is another reason to be drawing ever closer to God. (I Peter 5:8-9, James 4:7) NW

NEWS WATCH of the WORLD

In the last issue we looked at the economic woes coming out of Asia. This month we will revisit this subject with a follow up on what has transpired since. The "*Asian Contagion*" is far from over.

In addition, we will take a quick look at another subject. In the last issue, the question was asked, "Will the weather and other conditions in nature, like earthquakes, be picking up their fury?" February has seen a definite rise in both.

ECONOMIC GREED

Many economists have been busy this past month pumping up the confidence of investors. Greed has set in and people truly see a bargain. Investors have been reaping thirty percent per year from their stock holdings over the past three years. And who wants to see an end to that?

As with much of the church today, people in our nation prefer to stick their heads in the sand just like the ostrich mentioned in Lamentations 4. People don't want to face the reality of the dangers all around them. Instead, optimism reigns. Just look at what has happened in less than a month.

From the 2/23/98 edition of *Newsweek*, in an article titled, "*Focus on Your Money: Don't Buy the Asian Dip*," Ellen Spragins has some pretty

sobering observations. The article reports, "*Thailand's stocks have rocketed up 57 percent and South Korea's have bounced 41 percent higher.*" In addition, "*Barton Biggs, chairman of Morgan Stanley Asset Management, made the call, 'If things go right in Asia, we can make 30 to 40 percent over the next few months.'*"

But the article carries some dire warnings for anyone who will listen. As it goes on to say, "*Consider the differences between the Mexican meltdown and the Asian contagion. Mexico in 1994 was one country with one very big problem: \$29 billion of foreign short-term debt that the government couldn't repay. Though the solution--\$50 billion in loans and guarantees--wasn't instantaneous, it was tidy because there was only one borrower to bail out.*"

"*Asia, of course, involves many countries, each with its own cocktail of economic toxins. Let's take South Korea. It, too had a foreign short-term debt problem: \$23.4 billion owed by South Korea banks that was successfully renegotiated earlier this month. But that is just the tip of the debtberg. South Korean companies owe some \$300 billion to their own financial institutions, much of it due within the next six months. Pinched by higher interest rates and a sharp business slowdown, many companies can't pay. The brutal calculus of capitalism calls for them to fail and for banks to take their losses squarely on the balance sheet. Instead, last week the government persuaded banks to push back the due dates. In psychotherapy this is called denial. And in economies, just as in real life, its unhealthy.*"

Japan continues to be pushed by the international community to take a more active role in easing the stress in Asia. The Associated Press reported on the 23rd, "*Japan has been under intense international pressure to help ease the financial crisis elsewhere in Asia by reviving its moribund economy, now in the eighth year of a stubborn slump. In recent weeks, Japan's parliament has passed a \$230 billion package to help banks write off bad loans..*" Yet there are many who say this is not enough. Even the G7

that met in London on the 21st was not satisfied, as Reuters reported, "*The summit lashed Japan for not doing enough to help its Asian neighbors.*"

However, Japan itself is hurting deeply. In 1989, stocks on the Nikkei peaked at 38,915. Their bubble burst. The Nikkei is now hovering at around 16,500.

The Indonesian economy continues to be a bomb waiting to explode as even the International Monetary Fund continues threatening to reconsider its rescue funds if President Suharto establishes a currency panel to peg the country's currency to the dollar. As The Kyodo News Service reported on the G7 meeting, "*But the G7 partners totally dropped Indonesian issues in the last minute because of uncertainties over Suharto's real intention despite his reported decision to withdraw the currency plan.*"

In a report from Reuters concerning Alan Greenspan's report to Congress, "*The outlook for...the United States is less assured of late because of storm clouds massing over the Western Pacific and heading our way.*" But as in the past, greed will hold reality in abeyance.

NATURE'S INTENSITY

El Nino is beating on California and Florida with powerful intensity. Forecasters are bracing the country for more pounding by warning that this could continue for three more months. We may have seen nothing yet!

And how many of you heard anything about the earthquake in Afghanistan on February 4th that left over 4,500 dead and nearly 30,000 homeless? It is a sad commentary on our society when inquiries into the sexual conduct of our president become more news worthy than the death of thousands from a tragic disaster.

Let's not become hardened or insensitive to the conditions of a world in pain. We need to remain watchful to both the physical and spiritual conditions that are impacting our lives.