

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

December 1999

THE END?

This issue of *News Watch* contains a timely and sobering warning for all who will read and truly consider it. We may well be nearer the very end of this age, more than what most are willing to believe. Do you know why this is so? You need to understand the reasons why time is rapidly counting down for those of us in the Church of God.

Perhaps we feel we've heard "wolf, wolf" too many times. Ironically, we are to be watching for wolves as well as other signs that show where we are in time. Regardless of what may or may not soon transpire, we should always have a sense of urgency about our calling and the times in which we live in.

We have been hearing a lot of hype about Y2K for a long time, and now it is here. Starting nearly two years ago, I was being asked why I wasn't warning people about it. The reason is because Y2K will come and go without much fanfare. Rather than great economic devastation, the likely response from our ability to effectively combat the problem will likely be a stronger economic confidence. Such attitudes will only serve to accelerate the eventual burst from an over-inflated bubble in world stock markets. Y2K cannot be a major global problem because it does not fit into the timing of prophesied events. But those events may indeed begin to fall more quickly into place right after the year 2000.

The importance of this article has become even more important to me as I consider what I am doing right now. I am in flight to Kansas to perform the funeral of a long time member of God's Church, Dellar Lamb. She had known for some time that she was dying of lung cancer, and a few

months ago she asked if I would do this for her when that time came.

I first met the Lamb's over 25 years ago. Their hope, faith and work were geared toward the second coming of Jesus Christ, when the Kingdom of God will come to this earth. Now both have died and await the resurrection. I think of so many others who have died in the faith, and I can't help but think of still others who may die before another year passes.

I feel a kind of peaceful calm and gratitude for those whose battle has ended. Their good fight of faith has already come to an end. My real grief, heartache and concern is for those who are still alive, whose battle is not over. Hopefully you feel the same way or at least will come to feel the same way after reading this article.

The Work of God?

A few people found fault or simply didn't understand something that was addressed in the June-July issue of *News Watch* that was titled "Dead, Revived, Rejected!" Let's review the words in question from that issue and then consider a few similar areas of misunderstanding that relate to the warning contained in this current article.

"During the time of Philadelphia, we were blessed to be a part of a "work" that Jesus Christ had revived and opened doors to accomplish. Then, we were blessed to bind together in a kind of fraternal fellowship in one organization, the Worldwide Church of God. That work and those open doors are no longer before us, consequently that era is gone. No one belongs to that era anymore! Our desire should be to receive the warning and instruction of the era in which we now find ourselves.

*Jesus Christ told the Church that while it was in the Philadelphian era, He would bless them for their part and patience in what was to be accomplished at that time. As long as doors were opened to do a specific work, He would not let the "hour of temptation, which shall come upon the world" come upon them in that time. The promise was to those who were a part of that work while the doors were open to accomplish it. The promise was not to all individuals who were called during that time, but only for them while they lived in that time. That time is over. A new era is upon us. Those people called during the Philadelphian era, who now live in the Laodicean era, are no longer under that promise. During that time of revival and restoration, God would not let the end time tribulation come" (June-July issue of *News Watch*, page 3).*

If we are not careful we can read things into scripture. Some people have preconceived ideas that hinder their ability to recognize or admit some facets of our recent history. These hinder growth and usually lead to false conclusions and judgments about today's Church.

There are times when I marvel at how some ministers are still looking for a future falling away. If we are able to admit that the vast majority of the Church has already fallen away, then that would plainly cry out that such an apostasy or falling away has already occurred. It is difficult to grasp how a minister of God could be so blind. Perhaps some need to ask if such a person is indeed a minister.

Some ministers and brethren believe, and even teach, that the Church must grow large again so that the commission of the gospel being preached into all the world can be

fulfilled. Does such a belief and teaching actually deny God? Why is it so difficult for people to acknowledge that the commission to do this has already been done through Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong? The bottom line is that either it has or it has not been fulfilled. What do you believe and why? People need to be cautious as to what they deny and what they reject as being true. Some will find that they have indeed denied and rejected what God has done, not what any man has done.

By denying what God did through the Church and Mr. Armstrong up until the mid 1980's, we can be guilty of denying the "work" of God. There are many ministers who believe they must teach about a "Work of God" yet to be accomplished through their efforts and those of their organization. Brethren need to understand what they actually mean when they say such things.

What is the truth? Did God not do a great work, growing continually greater until the year of Mr. Armstrong's death? Has that work continued to grow since that time? What is the evidence? What is the true witness and testimony?

Some have based this false belief, that the gospel has yet to be preached into all the world, on a lack of understanding about this scripture. *"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"* (Matthew 24:14, KJV).

There are those who say this gospel could not have been preached into all the world, because the end has not yet come. The conclusion drawn is that if the end has not yet come, then someone else other than Mr. Armstrong must have that commission or that someone else must finish what has not yet been completed.

What is "the end?" Is the end a specific final point? Is it when Jesus Christ returns? Is it the time of the

Day of the Lord? Is it when the time of great physical tribulation begins on this earth? Is it the end of the millennium? Is it the end of the Great White Throne Judgement? Is it the time when many end time events are to occur, which have been prophesied to occur at the end, just before the return of Jesus Christ?

Are we blinded to what has been happening and continues to happen within the Church? Can we not grasp the most basic reality of where we find ourselves now? The end has come upon us! We are living in it! Are we too blind or asleep that we cannot see the obvious? The time of the Laodicean Church is at the end. There is not another era to follow it. This is the last one. There are many prophesied events that are to take place during this "end" time.

We also need to be careful how we use the term "God's Work." God has worked to accomplish His purpose over the millennia. Its specific focus has varied according to what needed to be accomplished at any specific period of time. For nearly 2,000 years His work has been primarily about the Church, about those He has called to be first in His family. The gospel, going into all the world, was to take place towards the end of this 2,000 years. It was to be a specific and a unique work toward the end. Notice again what Mr. Armstrong had to say about that work and that commission in his letter to the Church dated November 22, 1982. *"No one had proclaimed that Gospel to the world for nearly 1,900 years. I began proclaiming it then, but only to a small area in and around Lane County, Oregon [referring to the first Plain Truth in February of 1934]. Within 19 years I had proclaimed it by radio and the Plain Truth over the entire United States. Then, the first week of 1953--precisely 1,900 years (a century of time cycles of 19 years each), I began sending out this Gospel to all Europe over the world's most*

powerful radio station, Radio Luxembourg."

Is that phase of "the work" over? Is anyone coming close to accomplishing what was being done through Mr. Armstrong in preaching the gospel to this world? The truth is that no one is; no one is even coming close.

The fact is the gospel has been preached into all the world as a witness to the exact extent that God intended it to be. After that was accomplished, the end did come upon us. Notice the next verse that follows.

"When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place, (whoso readeth, let him understand:)" (Matthew 24:15, KJV). Mr. Armstrong always stopped at verse 14 and understood that this was the commission, the work, given to him and the Philadelphian Church to do. The reason he stopped at verse 14 is because that is what God had called him and revealed to him to do. After that commission had been accomplished, then verse 15 was to unfold, which had nothing to do with Mr. Armstrong nor the Philadelphian Church. The abomination of desolation was to occur at the end, after the gospel had been preached into all the world as a witness. Too many today do not believe that Mr. Armstrong and the Philadelphian Church finished the work God gave them to do. Our work today is to endure and hold fast to the foundational truths God gave us during Philadelphia and to be preparing ourselves for the soon coming Kingdom of God.

We live in the time of Laodicea. It is the end time when the abomination of desolation will be working upon the Church. The physical type of what is spoken of in Daniel is about the abomination that worked to destroy the temple. The spiritual type is about the Church, the spiritual temple, and the abomination that would work to destroy it at the end of this age.

The Hour of Temptation

The section quoted earlier out of the June-July issue of *News Watch* has been misunderstood by some. The comments made in that issue were in reference to what God told the Philadelphian Church to do.

A minister of one organization referred to that part of the *News Watch* and spoke of it in terms of being wrong and lacking in understanding. His belief seems to be that this verse in Revelation 3 promises people, who are Philadelphian, that they will be protected physically from the great tribulation that is yet to come on this earth. Is that what this verse says? Let's revisit this because it has great significance to understanding what we have gone through as a Church and what is fast approaching.

God told Philadelphia, "Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth" (Revelation 3:10, KJV). Does this verse say anything about physical protection from great tribulation?

To whom is this message directed? It is directed to those in the Church who were living in Philadelphia. That time is now long past and we are deep into the time of Laodicea.

What was this promise of God? Was it about keeping Philadelphians from having to suffer physically during a time of great physical destruction and tribulation that is yet to come upon this earth? No!

This promise was to the Church of God during the time it was given a great commission to support and accomplish. We correctly understood it and referred to it as the "Work of God." That phase of God's work is over. It is past! During the time of Philadelphia we were protected and kept from having to experience the events of the "end" referred to in Matthew 24:15 concerning the

abomination that would work to make desolate, which is about the Church.

God told the Church that during the time of Philadelphia they would be kept from the hour of temptation "which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth." Do we not understand? At the end of this age both the Church and this world will be tried. Both a physical and a spiritual fulfillment apply to so many prophecies. The Church will be tried first and go through a great spiritual tribulation, followed by this world going through a great physical tribulation. There has never been a time in history that comes close to comparing to the magnitude of trouble to be experienced by the Church or this world.

The Church is now being tried in this end time that is coming upon us. The scattered Church, throughout the world, is being tried to see if it will repent and indeed be faithful by holding fast to the commandments of God and the testimony - witness - of Jesus Christ. Not many seem to be doing that today.

Before the return of Jesus Christ, the last era of the Church is found to be spiritually lacking. It is actually found to be drifting off to sleep or already asleep. It was so filled with pride that God described it as having to be spewed out of His mouth. How many have awakened to these events and fully repented of the pride, apathy, and complacency that came upon us?

In 1986 the WCG had nearly 150,000 people attending worldwide. This year the WCG had only 6,160 attending the Feast in the United States (November *Worldwide News*, page 27). Also in this issue is the report of people taking communion at Feast sites. Can there be many left who may yet be able to escape? The rest of the Church, which has been scattered in all parts of this world, is not healthy either. We have been going through incredibly trying times as a people.

Most of what we once knew as the Church is now destroyed. It is indeed desolate. Early in 1995, approximately a third of the Church simply gave up and quit. Within a few more months, "traditional Christianity" engulfed another third of the Church. The destruction and desolation has furiously continued ever since. Now, not much remains.

Ask yourself some questions. What is more important? Is it more important for Philadelphia to be protected and saved from physical pain and suffering later on in the great tribulation or is it more important to be kept from spiritual destruction and desolation that has engulfed the Church for several years now?

When you look at this realistically it seems silly to ask such questions. Most of those who were in the WCG at the close of the Philadelphian era have now gone by the wayside. The Church during the time of Philadelphia was indeed kept from this time we have been experiencing for many years now. But no one has been kept from the spiritual tribulation now engulfing us during the time of Laodicea.

The hour of temptation that came into all the world, wherever God's people were, has resulted in a great scattering and desolation upon the Church. That hour of temptation is coming during this last period, known as Laodicea. It is upon all the Church throughout the world. There has been an abomination working within the Church and it is still working. The Church dwelling upon the earth during Laodicea is not promised to be kept from the hour of temptation. On the contrary, we are in it spiritually.

Ears to Hear?

Such things should be plain to us considering all that we have experienced as a Church. Do we have ears to hear what the spirit says to the churches? The "work" of preaching the gospel into all the world was a

commission given for the period of Philadelphia. After that was accomplished, to the extent that God determined, the beginning of the end did come upon the Church.

In recent years, we have been living through the time of Matthew 24:15, when brethren have had to flee for their spiritual lives, as the Church has been scattered in all parts of this world. There has been an abomination at work to make the Church, the spiritual temple, desolate. What is the evidence? What is the true witness to these events? Has it been happening or not?

Do we not grasp the abomination that has been causing such desolation within the Church? What is it that has caused people to flee? What changed within the WCG that has brought about such worldwide destruction on a spiritual temple?

It came from the top of human leadership. It spread wildly through the ministry that became mostly corrupt and then through the Church. This is described by 2 Thessalonians as a time of apostasy or falling away within the Church as has never occurred before. Those who sought to corrupt the Church by changing the most basic of doctrines are those who yielded themselves to being part of the abomination that makes desolate. The very core of who we are was corrupted. >From moving away from truth about the weekly and annual Sabbaths, tithing, and even clean and unclean meats, to moving closer to a

Trinitarian and universal church, the abomination that before would have been thought to be impossible has now been at work in the spiritual temple. What could be plainer?

Can you grasp how close we are to final end-time events and how rapidly they are approaching? There are specific events mentioned in 2 Thessalonians 2 that had to first take place before Jesus Christ would return to this earth. Those events are about the Church. An apostasy had to occur within the Church at the end before Jesus Christ would return. That has happened, and it has almost run its course. These events are the very thing that serve as an announcement to the Church that Jesus Christ is now coming, and we must be more zealous than ever to make ourselves ready.

The abomination that began working to make the Church desolate began by being officially declared on December 17, 1994 when Mr. Joe Tkach, Sr. gave a sermon in Atlanta, Georgia declaring the apostasy to the Church. He died exactly forty Sabbaths later. Does that mean anything to God's people? That apostasy which began officially in the Worldwide Church of God, working as an abomination to destroy the Church, is nearing its end.

How much longer do you think it will be until that abomination is complete? The greatest part of this abomination concerns that which identifies God's Church more than any other. It concerns the weekly Sabbath

and the annual Sabbaths. Although the official announcement in 1994 that declared such things are no longer commanded for God's people, the WCG has not completely fulfilled the abomination that has been at work to destroy the Church of God. It should cause fear in people to know how close it might be to the total fulfillment of this prophecy. It will be when they officially change the Sabbath and do away with the Holy Days all together. If the words of Daniel and other prophecies are indeed about what is still going on in the WCG, then we are very near the end of the abomination that has been making desolate.

Next, on the heels of the fulfillment of the abomination of desolation, is the great physical tribulation that will come on all this world. Are you repenting and becoming more zealous towards God? That is what Laodicea is instructed to do. If we know that Jesus Christ is indeed at the door and ready to enter, we will be responding by making ourselves ready, more than ever in our past! We must focus more fully on preparing ourselves for the soon coming Kingdom of God and helping prepare any of our family who will listen.

Are we sobered to consider how near the end may be? God has been warning us for some time. Are we listening? We are racing toward the end of the end. **NW**