

CHURCH OF THE
G E T E R N A L

"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

January 7, 2004

Dear Brethren and Friends:

As most modern societies count the years, we have entered the year of 2004. When reflecting on what the world experienced in 2003, chances are, the year of 2004 will hear more of the same bad news, except, perhaps, in an even worse way. Let us briefly remind ourselves of some of the news in 2003 (You might want to "read along with us," by looking at the headlines in our *Current Event* sections of our weekly Updates of 2003):

January 2003: Worldwide Times of Terror; Captivity—Beyond the Pale; Big Brother in the U.S.; The European Union and the United Nations vs. the U.S. and Great Britain; U.S. Divided Against Itself; The Roman Catholic and Protestant Churches vs. U.S.

February 2003: America's Troubles—And No End; America and Europe—a Great Divide; Is the World Facing World Destruction?; Droughts in Australia and the U.S.

March 2003: Assassination in Serbia; Moab—the Mother of All Bombs; Ongoing Conflict with North Korea; Will There Be Peace?

April 2003: Victory—but at What Price?; Cold War in Asia; How Safe Is This World?

May 2003: Earthquakes; World Hunger; U.S. Deflation; SARS—and No End in Sight

June 2003: Unprecedented U.S. National Debt; Apocalypse Now; Iraq—a Thorn in the Flesh; HIV; Supreme Court Strikes Down Gay Sex Ban; Ongoing Attacks in Iraq

July 2003: Nuclear Attacks on the U.S.?; U.S. States Deficit Highest Since World War II; U.S. National Missile Defense System Useless?

August 2003: Religious Persecution in Europe; New Terror Attacks in Sight?; Sex Crimes Cover Up by Vatican?; Iran's and Syria's Long-Range Missiles; Russia Hit by Meteor; Homosexuality in Church Leadership; The Great Darkness; West Nile Cases

September 2003: Terror Attacks in the U.K.; Earthquakes and Asteroids; Road Map to War? Sweden, the Euro and Murder; Ignored War in Northeastern Congo

October 2003: Water Shortage in Australia; Firestorms in California, Colorado and B.C.

November 2003: Witches Accepted; Unbalanced Fear of Anti-Semitism; Reinstitution of the U.S. Draft; Religious Persecution in Germany; Homosexuality in England; Russia—Stalin

Remains Popular; Terror in Istanbul; U.S. Dollar Keeps Falling; Gay Rights on the March; Religious Rights Are Threatened

December 2003: EU Warns Israel; Iraq War Opponents Barred From Bidding; U.S. Retreats From Germany; Zimbabwe Resigns From Commonwealth; Mad Cow Disease in the U.S.; Earthquake in California

This was just a representative sample of topics discussed in our weekly Updates—“bad” news that is nevertheless interesting, important and perhaps even necessary to occur, in light of Biblical prophecy. (If you have not carefully read our weekly Updates during this past year, you see what you might have been missing.)

But then, we also brought you very encouraging news—as it relates to our part in God’s Work of preaching the gospel and feeding the flock. Every Update contains a Biblical Question and Answer section, as well as an Editorial discussing Christian living or other Biblically related issues. These columns include many Biblical quotes backing up what is being said. (In carefully reading our Updates, you were able to conduct your own personal Bible studies in regard to almost 100 Biblical topics.)

By the end of 2003, we had produced 13 booklets and a reprint article in English, as well as two booklets and several articles in German, and one booklet and several articles in French, all of which have been posted on our Websites. We conducted advertising campaigns in England and Canada, offering some of our booklets. We received hundreds of responses from brand-new people. Further, we had produced, by the end of 2003, almost 25 *StandingWatch* Internet broadcasts, discussing current events in the light of Biblical prophecies, and pointing the listener and viewer to the right way of living, as revealed in God’s Word. (We also began, in 2003, the process of designing an additional Webpage, directed mainly at brand-new people who have had little or no contact with any of the Sabbath-keeping Church of God organizations.) In addition, we sent out our monthly member letters, as well as taped audio sermons for our scattered brethren without Internet access, who are unable to listen to our live Internet Sabbath services.

All of this is VERY good news, as the truth of God is thus being made available to everyone who has Internet access, and to many, who heard about, and requested, our written publications. So far, we have received email messages and letters from readers in the United States, Canada, Great Britain, Continental Europe, Australia, New Zealand, the Philippines, Vietnam, and Africa.

It is important not to lose sight of why we are here. In light of all the “bad” news, which we had in 2003, and which can be expected to continue and worsen in 2004, coupled with personal trials and shortcomings, it is easy to lose faith and the desire to continue with zeal and dedication in the most important task which could possibly exist today—the task of giving hope to this dying world and to the called-out disciples of Christ. We do this by preaching and teaching God’s truth to all that are willing to listen. We may do this directly and immediately, by writing and reviewing articles and booklets, speaking in sermons, sermonettes or on Internet broadcasts; helping before, during and after Sabbath services; assisting with Internet broadcasts; maintaining and updating our Websites; sending out our booklets and Updates; preparing and

distributing audio sermon tapes; sending interesting news articles to San Diego for the Updates; or translating articles and booklets into foreign languages. There are many other immediate and direct ways to assist in the great Work of God, not even mentioned here. At the same time, we are commanded by God to faithfully bring our tithes and offerings to “God’s storehouse,” (compare Malachi 3:8-10), so that God’s Work can continue. Tithing is a personal obligation toward God. It is a sin not to tithe, either because of flagrant intentional disobedience, or because of continued neglect or indifference. God will not hold guiltless those who are rebellious, or even negligent toward His Word. And, to be sure, tithing is an obligation of man (Malachi 3:8), not just of Church members. Finally, one of the most important ways of supporting the Work of God is heartfelt prayer, coupled with occasional fasting. Christ commands us to pray for the Work of God (compare Luke 10:2), which goes forward on the knees of all of those whom God has called to have a part in His Work.

And so, there is no time to become slack and lackadaisical. We KNOW that our trials for, and our efforts in the Work are not in vain (compare Galatians 3:4; 1 Corinthians 15:58). We KNOW that Christ will come soon to give us our *full* reward (2 John 8) for our diligence and perseverance (Revelation 22:12). We KNOW that we must overcome (Revelation 2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21). We must overcome our sinful nature, this world, and Satan the devil, the ruler of this world. It has been a time-proven fact that the best and most successful way of overcoming these three enemies is direct and continuous involvement in the Work of God. This is the case, as we focus on others, rather than on ourselves. We develop outgoing love for others, thereby becoming more and more like God (Matthew 5:48), Who IS love (1 John 4:16).

Yes, there will be trials and difficulties. We must through MANY tribulations enter the Kingdom of God (Acts 14:22; compare also Psalm 34:19). The righteous may fall seven times, but he does not give up. He gets up every time and continues to walk the walk (compare Proverbs 24:16). He has the HOPE of eternal life in the Kingdom of God clearly in front of his eyes (compare Titus 1:2). This hope motivates him to continue (compare Hebrews 6:17-20).

We have much to do in 2004. We have been discussing new projects, including the writing and publication of additional booklets and ad campaigns. Doors are open before us, but only through the combined efforts of all those, whose heart God has touched, will we be able to go through those doors. And MOST IMPORTANTLY, we must do so because we want to serve God, and because we LOVE those whom He wants us to reach. We MUST NEVER develop the attitude of becoming “big” in our own eyes, because of the success, which God might grant us. This was the downfall of King Saul. This has become the downfall of many in recent years who had joined the Worldwide Church of God, because it had become a somewhat “respectable” organization, with expensive buildings, and with a human leader who was invited by governmental officials all over the world. None of those activities and possessions were wrong, of course. In fact, due to the diligence and perseverance of its human leader, God blessed his and the Church’s efforts, even in physical respects. But, the motives of those were wrong who “joined” the Church BECAUSE of those “prestigious” activities and costly buildings. We must keep our right perspective. God will not continue to use someone in His Work who is more concerned about his status, financial security, salary or pension, as well as his personal image—as to how he is viewed by others—than he is concerned about God’s truth, including a genuine humility on his part and his willingness to repent of his sins and mistakes. The Bible is very clear on this point. Let’s not forget this vital lesson. As experience and the record of history have shown, it is easy to fall into

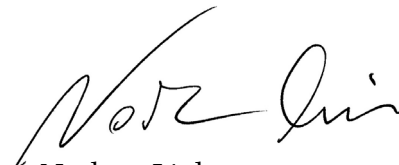
the pit of self-glorification, thereby misappropriating for oneself titles that exclusively belong to Christ, or titles which God did not bestow on a particular person.

At the same time, let all of us, in the Church of the Eternal God, and in its corporate affiliates in Canada and Great Britain, remain humble, always abounding in the Work of God, and in the faith of Jesus Christ. Then, no obstacle will be too difficult for us to overcome, and no trial will defeat us. Nobody knows when Christ will return. But those who understand Biblical prophecies know that it is not very far away. That is why we must continue to watch world events—but we must do so as a MOTIVATION to grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ, and to overcome our weaknesses. The Church is asked to preach, as part of the gospel message, REPENTANCE to all that are willing to listen (Luke 24:46-47). Most people think today that they have no need to repent. This is even true for some—if not many—in the Church. Christ warns all of us, in Revelation 3:19: “... be zealous and repent.” If we don’t repent, He will vomit us out of His mouth (compare Revelation 3:16). This warning must be taken very seriously.

We are called to succeed—individually and also collectively, as a part of God’s Church. God did not call us out of this world so that we should fail. God did not inspire us to continue with preaching the gospel and feeding the flock, only to meet miserable defeat. God does not want us to give up and cease doing the Work, by wrongly convincing ourselves that the Work of God has been completed. If we only concentrate on “feeding the flock”—how WE can “make it into the Kingdom of God”—then we act selfishly. If we only join a Church organization to have “a good time” in Church, by being together with friends and engaging in social activities, then, again, we act selfishly. And selfishness is not a character trait or a fruit of God’s Holy Spirit of love (compare 2 Timothy 1:7)—which is outgoing concern for the benefit of others. Also, we must not be ashamed of God’s Word (Romans 1:16). If we are afraid to proclaim the truth boldly and without compromise, because we fear that someone might become upset about the truth, then we do not obey the express command of Christ, not to be ashamed of Him and His Word in this “adulterous and sinful generation” (Mark 8:38; Luke 9:26).

But, it is always our choice. We can choose to stay zealous and dedicated to God and His Work, or we can decide to give up. We pray to God that YOU will continue to please God and others—not merely yourself—by showing genuine love for the welfare of a world that is suffering with anguish and pain. When God is WITH and IN you, who can defeat you? NOBODY will be able to—except you yourself.

With Christian love



Norbert Link