

CHURCH OF THE
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

February 14, 2005

Dear Brethren and Friends,

In the beginning months of this year, we have been witnessing the continuing and gathering march of events that were long ago prophesied to occur. God has left an unerring record of warning for all who would listen to Him—through His inspired Word and through the inspiration of His servants whom He has called to faithfully proclaim His gospel of hope.

The very things that we report, through the weekly updates, the *StandingWatch* programs, the weekly sermons and sermonettes as well as in our booklets, are those significant occurrences that parallel and actually mark fulfillment of Biblical prophecy. We stand as witnesses to the global restructuring of world powers—all of which will be used by God to usher in His Kingdom under the all-powerful direction of Jesus Christ!

Beyond carefully watching these cataclysmic changes in our generation, we need to look closely at the Church of God that Jesus Christ established—both its historical record and the very compelling prophetic statements that apply to our time!

For many of us who have been around the Church of God for several decades, we now recognize that the true faith has undergone a powerful and destructive assault from Satan. The Bible reveals that these kinds of things were prophesied to occur. Yet, the Word of God also shows that there is coming an even more intense attack from Satan against God's people!

Here is what Jesus Christ said to His own true disciples—a statement that transcended those alive then to actually hear His words, and a warning that finds dramatic fulfillment in the closing generation of our age: “And Jesus answered and said to them: ‘Take heed that no one deceives you’” (Matthew 24:4).

How can we know if we have been deceived? For each one of us who now reads these words, is there any possibility that we have been deceived?

This is a fair and necessary question we each must weigh. We will find our answer by using the immutable standard of God's Word along with a humble, willing and contrite heart asking for God's help in the matter (See Isaiah 66:2). There are times when we must take the approach that David had—to make certain that we are truly serving God and fulfilling His will in our lives. You can read about David's remarkable attitude and example in Psalm 51.

One important condition identified by Jesus that would challenge His followers is found in Matthew 24:12: “‘And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold.’” For “abound,” Lamsa translates this as, “the *growth of iniquity*”; the NASB translates this as, “*increased*”; and, the Living Bible translates the verse, “Sin will be rampant everywhere and will cool the love of many.”

Have we allowed our love to grow cold? Are we guilty of fulfilling this prophecy through the deception of withdrawing into an attitude that ONLY involves getting ourselves ready for the establishment of God's Kingdom?

In the closing period of the very first generation of the Church of God, Paul cautioned those of his day that dramatic events were still on the future horizon before Jesus Christ would return: "Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, we ask you, not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us, as though the day of Christ had come" (2 Thessalonians 2:1-2).

Next, note how Paul continues his explanation: "Let no one deceive you by any means: for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as god in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God" (2 Thessalonians 2:3-4).

Why would some fall away?

Because their love for God's truth would grow cold, and they would turn back to this evil world which stands in rebellion against God! Peter, also writing in the waning period of the Church of God in his lifetime, speaks—in 2 Peter, chapter 2—of false prophets deceiving the people of God: "For when they speak great swelling words of emptiness, they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through lewdness, the ones who have actually escaped from those who live in error. While they promise them liberty, they themselves are slaves of corruption; for by whom a person is overcome, by him also he is brought into bondage" (verses 18-19).

Peter also records this sobering admonition: "For if, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning. For it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them" (2 Peter 2:20-21).

In Revelation 1, verse 20, Jesus Christ reveals that "...the seven lampstands which you [John] saw are the seven churches." What follows in chapters 2 and 3 are specific messages to these seven churches—now correctly understood as including the seven distinct eras of the Church of God from the time when He first established the Church until the time of His return.

In considering the state of the Church of God at the present time, we need to understand what Christ says to ALL of the churches. In addition, let us take particular note of the final two eras of God's Church—Philadelphia and Laodicea.

The evidence here indicates that these two eras co-exist (remnants of other eras may have survived as well). Revelation 3:10 says: "I also will *keep you from the hour of trial* which shall come upon the whole world." In verses 16 and 18, Jesus states: "I will vomit you out of My mouth... I counsel you to buy from Me gold *refined in the fire*..." We understand that a period of unparalleled suffering is being addressed in both passages—in the one, protection is offered, while in the other, severe correction during a time called "GREAT TRIBULATION" must be endured.

We also find explained the reasons for the different pronouncements. As in the case of all the eras, Jesus states, “I know your works” (Revelation 3:8). Continuing the message to Philadelphia in verse 8: “...‘See, I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it; for you have a little strength, have kept My word, and have not denied My name.”

In the message to Laodicea, Jesus makes this telling statement: “Behold, I stand at the door and knock” (Revelation 3:20). Why did THEY shut their door to Jesus? Here is the answer: “I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. So then, because you are LUKEWARM, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth” (Revelation 3:15-16).

Notice how the Laodiceans are self-deceived: “Because you say, “I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing”—and DO NOT KNOW that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked” (Revelation 3:17). The spiritual applications for all of us are inescapable—these are spiritual issues relating to how we bear the fruits of God’s Holy Spirit as outlined in Galatians 5.

Jesus also gave a striking parable about wise and foolish virgins in Matthew 25. Note this pivotal statement in verse 5: “But while the bridegroom was delayed, they ALL SLUMBERED AND SLEPT.” Jesus gave this lesson for His followers so that they would be ready when He returns: “Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming” (verse 13).

In an extraordinary prophecy encompassing the very few years just before Jesus returns to this earth, we find additional statements about God’s true people. Revelation 12, verse 13, shows that Satan persecutes the “woman”—the Church of God. In verse 14, note what is stated about some of God’s people: “But the woman was given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness to her place, where she is nourished for a time and times and half a time (3 ½ years), from the PRESENCE of the serpent.”

Although Satan will try to use his power to destroy these Christians, he will not be successful—as shown in verses 15-16. However, another part of God’s Church will not find the same kind of protection: “And the dragon was enraged with the woman (God’s Church), and he went to MAKE WAR with the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.”

In the final statement to each of the seven churches of Revelation 2 and 3, Jesus Christ says: “He who has an ear, LET HIM HEAR what the Spirit says to the churches...”

That really is our challenge, today! Do we take what God is saying to us—personally? Simply having knowledge of the truth of God is not enough! We must act on it with unquenchable enthusiasm and an alert readiness as we watch for and proclaim the return of Jesus Christ!

Brethren, there is a time factor for each of us to have a part in God’s Work. Jesus understood this even in the work He was sent to accomplish: “I must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day; the night is coming when no one can work” (John 9:4).

As we continue to take to heart the warnings given to all of us who are a part of the Church of God, we can be encouraged by these words: “But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this

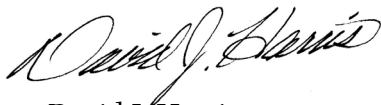
Day should overtake you as a thief. You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night. But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love and as a helmet the hope of salvation” (1 Thessalonians 5: 4-8).

Then, in verses 9-11: “For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him. Therefore comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing.”

Since we have been given these promises from God and since we do have a living High Priest—Jesus Christ—we must hold onto what we have been given. If we can do that, we will never be deceived—not by Satan, not by this world and, importantly, not even by ourselves!

May God continue to strengthen each one of you in His marvelous calling.

In Christ’s Service,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "David J. Harris".

David J. Harris