

► THIS ISSUE'S READING

“THE ASCENSION OF CHRIST INTO HEAVEN: ANOTHER LOOK INTO VARIOUS ASPECTS OF THIS ESSENTIAL BIBLICAL TRUTH”

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“Watchman, what of the night ?”



“The hour has come, the hour is striking, and striking at you, the hour and the end!” Ezekiel 7:6 (Moffatt)

Editor's Preface

As the year 2020 was coming to an end, and in composing this latest thought paper, this Editor could not help recalling the many things this past year that truly had a major impact on us all. The COVID-19 pandemic and the awareness of other immediate threats posed by chemical and biological agents, the increase in natural disasters, the intensifying social, political, and financial unrest, the rampant 'tribalism' and the resultant 'polarization' occurring among splintered factions, the escalating proliferation of misinformation spread through newer technologies like social media, the worsening confusion throughout Christendom (sadly) even, and often, among the more 'professed' Bible believing faith groups [and, yes, this includes - more sadly yet - Seventh-day Adventists], the general, universal chaos on display seemingly everywhere, and ... well, the list could go on and on!

This recollection is a reminder to us all that the time for God's faithful people to proclaim the present truths during this judgment hour is fast taking us ever closer to the second coming of Jesus! Surely if the adage "we are living on borrowed time" was an indication of the compassion, mercy, and love of God because He "is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3: 9), it is now!



The topic for this edition of WWN is a write-up on an aspect related to Christ's ascension into heaven that is, again, not well contemplated. How do we reconcile the scriptural revelation that the Messianic age is both a time of glory and enlightenment and, at the same time, one of intensified satanic activity? We will explore what God's Word has to say concerning this.

THE ASCENSION OF CHRIST INTO HEAVEN: ANOTHER LOOK INTO VARIOUS ASPECTS OF THIS ESSENTIAL BIBLICAL TRUTH - 5 -

The Perils Of The Last Days (The Messianic Age) -

The New Testament reveals that the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the followers of the Lord Jesus Christ during the festival of Pentecost in 31 A.D. was the most glorious 'public' event bestowed by God since the wondrous giving of His Law on Mount Sinai. As all who were present at the mountain during the time of the Exodus to witness the phenomenal manifestation of the LORD's power and majesty were astonished, awe-stricken, and "afraid by reason of the fire," (Deuteronomy 5: 5) so, likewise, those who were present at Pentecost to witness the miraculous descent of the Holy Spirit at that time "were all amazed and marvelled," "and were in doubt" (Acts 2: 7, 12), by the extraordinary display of God's supernatural grandeur also. In fact, the Pentecostal occurrence was Heaven's signal that the *time* "all the prophets from Samuel and those that [followed] after, ... have likewise foretold of" had come. (Acts 3: 24). From the first Messianic promise given in Eden shortly after humanity's fall into sin (Genesis 3: 15), to the first advent of Jesus (the Christ/Messiah)

and the completion of His earthly salvific work, all of Bible history had looked forward with hopeful and eager anticipation to the arrival of the prophesied Messianic age. Its importance for all of God's creation in the overall plan of salvation even surpasses the glory exhibited earlier with the giving of the Law, as the apostle Paul notes:

"But if the ministration of death, written and engraven in stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not stedfastly behold the face of Moses for the glory of his countenance; which glory was to be done away: How shall not the ministration of the spirit be rather glorious? For if the ministration of condemnation be glory, much more doth the ministration of righteousness exceed in glory. For even that which was made glorious had no glory in this respect, by reason of the glory that excelleth. For if that which is done away was glorious, much more that which remaineth is glorious." (2 Corinthians 3: 7-11).

Also, along these same lines, Paul writes to Hebrew Christians regarding the preeminence of this age over the former era:

"For ye are not come unto the mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire, nor unto blackness, and darkness, and tempest, And the sound of a trumpet, and the voice of words; which voice they that heard intreated that the word should not be spoken to them anymore: (For they could not endure that which was commanded, And if so much as a beast touched the mountain, it shall be stoned, or thrust through with a dart: And so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, I exceedingly fear and quake:) But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, To the general assembly and church of

the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel." (Hebrews 12: 18-24).

And yet for all the magnificence and splendor attendant to the Messianic dispensation - these "last days" before the "restitution of all things" - we would be amiss if we did not present what the Scriptures teach concerning all aspects of this time. Interestingly, from the same inspired writer just quoted (who extols the glory of this era), we *additionally* get the following revelation:

"This know also, that *in the last days* ('the final age of this world,' NEB) ¹ *perilous times* shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, Without natural affection, truce-breakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, Traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away ...

"Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution. But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived." (2 Timothy 3: 1-5, 12-13, emphasis added).

The contrast that Paul sets forth here in writing to his younger colleague in the faith seems quite startling. This time of increased light and enlightenment, particularly for the people of God, will *also*, simultaneously, be one of peril (Greek, χαλεποί, *chalepoi* - ("difficult, grievous, stressful / distressing, terrible, dangerous, violent"), characterized by persecution for "all that will live godly in

Christ Jesus." Some of the other apostles of Christ bear the same witness in this regard. The apostle Peter, after introducing the fact that as "there were false prophets also among the people" in the former age so "there shall be false teachers among you" during this final age, continues by expounding upon all the evil they will bring upon God's people, the world, and even themselves. (2 Peter 2: 1-22). He then emphatically warns:

"Knowing this first, that there shall come *in the last days* scoffers, walking after their own lusts, And saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation." (2 Peter 3: 3-4, emph. added).

Jude, as well, bears witness to this in his letter to Christian believers with the following testimony:

"But, beloved, remember ye the words which were spoken before of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ; How that they told you there should be mockers *in the last time*, who should walk after their own ungodly lusts." (Jude, 17-18, emph. added).

James, in reference to the "last days," describes the accumulation of "riches" and the accompanying corruption that often results, as a major factor contributing to the perils of the final era of this present evil world:

"Go to now, ye rich men, weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you ...

" ... Ye have heaped treasure together *for the last days*." (James 5: 1, 3b, emph. added).

And the apostle John, likewise, weighs in on this issue by declaring:

"Little children, *it is the last time* (Greek, ὥρα, *hora* - ("an hour [lit. or fig.], a time or period)): and as ye have heard that anti-christ shall come, even now are there many

antichrists; whereby we know that *it is the last time.*" (1 John 2: 18).

John associates the "perilous times" of this present final dispensation *directly* with the satanic manifestation of the anti-Christian power to come. He stresses the immediacy/urgency of Satan's proceeding activity during this age by warning the believers that the "hour" had already arrived in his day by the appearance "even [then]" of "many antichrists" (e.g., Cerinthians, Docetists, proto-Gnostics, etc.). Through the intermingling of various forms of heathen ideologies with Christianity, a false counterfeit of true Christianity was developing and growing early on "even" though the Messianic age had just arrived. This fallacious pagan/Christian amalgam of corruption and deceit eventually emerged, after the downfall of Imperial Rome (476 A.D.), as the religio/political system of the Roman Catholic Papacy. It was the great apostasy of the "last days" foretold by the prophets of the former era - most pointedly by the prophet Daniel under the symbolism of the "little horn" in Chapters 7 and 8 of his book.

Similarly, the apostle Paul had written (a few decades earlier than John's letters) to the Thessalonian Christians warning them of the "falling away" (Greek, ἡ ἀποστασία, *he apostasia* - "the apostasy, the defection/ departure [from truth], the revolt") that would occur "first" before "the day of Christ" "and ... our gathering together unto him." (i.e., sometime later *during* the "latter times" but before the second coming of Jesus) – 2 Thessalonians 2: 1-3a. This falling away would *reveal* (uncover, manifest, make known, disclose) the power/person responsible for it, even "that man of sin ... the son of perdition ... Who ... as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is

God, ... that Wicked ... whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders" (Ibid. 2: 3b-4, 8-9). Paul had previously "told" the Thessalonian believers "these things" and had informed them then that this "mystery of iniquity [was] already [working]" when he talked with them earlier. (See Ibid. 2: 5-7).

Plainly, both Paul's "man of sin" and John's "antichrist" are describing (as aforementioned) the same satanic "little horn" power prophesied in Chapters 7 and 8 of Daniel. John also identifies it (and/or its allies) in the book of Revelation as "Jezebel" (2: 20), the "beast" powers (13: 1-18), and "Babylon the great" (17: 1-18; 18: 1-24). And Paul, like John, also links the falling away directly with satanic activity yet to come but was already manifesting itself in various ways as he penned his *first* letter written to Timothy:

"Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that *in the latter times* some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to *seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils*" (1 Timothy 4: 1, *emph. added*).

Perhaps the best scriptural exposition unveiling and explaining the how and why of this concurrent increase in heavenly glory and enlightenment on one hand, with increased, intensified satanic activity on the other hand (all during this final age) is found in the twelfth Chapter of Revelation. This chapter outlines in symbols the cosmic conflict between Christ and Satan:

"And there appeared a great wonder in heaven; a woman ... And she being with child cried ... pained to be delivered. And there appeared another wonder in heaven ... a great red dragon ... and the dragon stood before the woman which was ready to be delivered, for to devour her child as soon as it was born. And she brought forth a man

child, who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron: and her child was caught up unto God, and to his throne. And the woman fled into the wilderness, where ... they should feed her there a thousand two hundred and threescore days." (Revelation 12: 1-6).

These verses portray symbolically the incarnation of Christ and the attempt by Satan to destroy Him shortly after He was born. However, Satan's effort was not successful as the "man child" (Jesus) was victorious over him in that He "was caught up unto God, and to his throne" (a reference to Christ's ascension into heaven) to fulfill His foretold destiny "to rule all nations with a rod of iron."

In contrast, "the woman," who gave birth to Jesus (not His literal mother Mary but, representatively, the true people of God comprising His Church in both the Jewish and Christian dispensations - compare Isaiah 54: 5-6 and Ephesians 5: 25-32) is presented as fleeing "into the wilderness" to "a place prepared of God" for "a thousand two hundred and threescore days." The prophecy then continues:

"And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels, And prevailed not ... And the great dragon ... called the Devil, and Satan ... was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him. And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night. And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony ... Therefore rejoice, ye heavens, and ye that dwell in them. Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and of sea! for the

devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time. And when the dragon saw that he was cast unto the earth, he persecuted the woman which brought forth the man child. And to the woman were given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness, into her place, where she is nourished for a time, and times, and half a time, from the face of the serpent." (Revelation 12: 7-14).

The text now outlines figuratively, in one grand sweeping representation, the Great Controversy motif, from the original war in heaven down to the first advent of Christ. And it is here, in particular, that we get the most informative answers to the issues under discussion. After all, if Jesus successfully won the victory over all the forces of the Devil opposing God and His people through His completed/finished *earthly* salvific work (as the Scripture *does* indicate - see Colossians 2: 15, for *one* example), and in the aftermath a new final age of spiritual light and glory which was inaugurated at the ascension of Christ into heaven (as the Scripture *also* indicates - review the biblical references on this in these series of studies), then how are we to understand the coinciding escalation and intensification of satanic activities? To many, this all seems - at the very least - like a puzzling anomaly. Therefore, let's examine the foregoing text before us.

The first thing to notice in regard to this "war" is the fact that "the dragon fought and his angels, And prevailed not" ('had not the strength to win,' NEB ¹; 'was defeated,' GNB). ² Therefore, Michael/Christ and His angels are the ones who are victorious! Moreover their triumph is set in the broader context of the ongoing cosmic struggle with the Devil and his demonic forces. Starting

with Satan's rebellion in heaven, it was because Michael (the pre-incarnate Christ) was 'stronger' than His foe that the Enemy was then "cast out/cast down ('thrown down,' NEB) ¹ from heaven. Compare this with the prophecy in Ezekiel 28: 11-19 which reveals, under the figure of the "king of Tyrus," additional detail concerning the "[casting] ... as profane out of the mountain of God" (heaven), "the anointed cherub that covereth" because he had "sinned" (note esp., verses 14-17). However, the depiction in Revelation, Chapter 12 moves beyond this point by making the same application regarding the casting out of Satan (again, his defeat) to the time of the death of Christ and His subsequent resurrection and ascension/glorification in heaven. Note, right after describing the "casting out" of the Devil within the framework of the beginning of the rebellion (Ibid. 12: 7-9), the text then goes on to declare, in verses 10-11:

"Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night. And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony" (emph. added).

This defeat of Satan at the time of the sacrificial offering of Jesus on the cross, agrees perfectly with what Jesus Himself said shortly before His crucifixion:

"Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me. This he said, signifying what death he should die." (John 12: 31-33, emph. added).

By linking the victory of Michael (the pre-incarnate Christ) at the outset of the celestial "war" with the victory of Jesus (the incarnate

Christ) at the cross), Revelation speaks of both events in a near identical manner because the outcome throughout the entire context of the Great Controversy is always the same - the victory of Christ/defeat of Satan. And while from the first initial battle, the conflict between Christ and Satan has been historically advancing forward, the victory gained by Jesus at the cross marked a decisive turning point in the plan of salvation. It guaranteed that a final end of Satan and all his allies, promised in prophecy, would ultimately become a reality for all of creation because Jesus has already gained (through His victory at the cross and His succeeding resurrection/glorification) all power in heaven and earth to accomplish it. Having totally failed to thwart and destroy Christ Himself during the time of His earthly mission and work, the Enemy, as the narrative continues in Revelation, Chapter 12, now turns his "wrath" toward "the woman," God's people:

"Therefore rejoice, ye heavens, and ye that dwell in them. Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and sea! for the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time. And when the dragon saw that he was cast unto the earth, he persecuted the woman which brought forth the man child." (Ibid. 12: 12-13, emph. added).

Briefly, these verses reveal that while the "heavens" rejoice over Christ's conclusive victory at the cross and subsequent glorification, the "earth and sea," simultaneously, is in woe due to the Devil's "great wrath" that has "come down unto" them "because he knoweth that he hath but a short time." This is the answer to the 'how' and 'why' of what seems to be a bewildering anomaly for many as we indicated earlier. The salvific earthly

work of Jesus, which ushered in this final age of glory, has definitively *sealed* the eventual doom of Satan and all those allied with him as foretold and promised by God in the former era. This is the 'how' that causes rejoicing in heaven while at the same time it produces woe on the earth. The 'why' that causes rejoicing in heaven while it simultaneously brings woe on the earth is due to the fact that the Devil "knoweth that he hath but a short time." What he thought he had an eternity to accomplish, first the establishment of his kingdom permanently in heaven and then, after his original expulsion from heaven, the permanent establishment of his kingdom on earth, has been *permanently ended* by Christ's decisive victory at the cross. Satan knows that since then (and against the backdrop of eternity), he has but a short time left before his *permanent destruction*. And while he has consistently been on the losing side of the war from its commencement, now that his doom has been effectively assured, he has responded with "great wrath" upon "the inhabitants of the earth and sea," being more determined than ever in his refusal to yield the contest by

continuing to fight on!

Yet, all of this for him will ultimately be in vain and will surely come to nought. While Christ's faithful people "overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony," the prophecy referred to earlier in Ezekiel 28: 18-19 (again, under the figure of "the king of Tyrus") records the destruction and total eradication of Satan in the following striking manner:

"Thou hast defiled thy sanctuaries by the multitude of thine iniquities, by the iniquity of thy traffick; therefore will I bring forth a fire from the midst of thee, it shall devour thee, and I will bring thee to ashes upon the earth in the sight of all them that behold thee. All they that know thee among the people shall be astonished at thee: thou shalt be a terror, and never shalt thou be any more." (Ezekiel 28: 18-19, *emph. added*).

» *To be Continued.*

1. *The New English Bible* (Cambridge University Press, 1972), 253, 302, 302.
2. *Good News Bible* (Philadelphia, PA: American Bible Society, January 1976).

*All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated.

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Founder	Elder William H. Grotheer
Editor, Publications & Research	Gary L. Patrick
Associate Editor	Dennis J. Tevis
Proofreader	William E. Caloudes

WEBSITES

www.alfiowa.com
www.adventistlaymen.com

E-MAIL

Editor - alfia@myomnitel.com

Webmaster - webmaster@adventistlaymen.com

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