



Bible Student's Notebook™

The Herald of His Grace

Presenting every man perfect in Christ Jesus. Colossians 1:28

Volume IX
Issue 219

A Light in a Dark Place

by – Cecil J. Blay

We have also a more sure Word of prophecy; whereunto you do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts. Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the Scripture is of any private interpretation (II Peter 1:19-20, Authorized Version).

A booklet recently received and intended for believers compares the state of present world conditions with those which prevailed in the time of Noah, and assumes from this that we live in the time our Lord foresaw in Matthew 24:37.

As were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of man.

For reasons about to follow here, we dissent from that conclusion, and we trust this may help to dispel much unsound and unhealthy speculation about Messianic prophecy.

No one will deny that there are similarities between the evils of modern society and the much greater evils of the days before the Flood, but such an approach to prophecy is no more than making circumstances fit cases. It is not a desirable method of dealing with Scripture.

The importance of understanding prophecy as far as we are able, like the understanding of all Scripture, is something no true believer will deny ... Not all may realize, however, that outside the Book of Revelation and the recorded words of our Lord, the Greek Scriptures contain very little about "prophecy," meaning here a forecast of God's future purposes.

Much has been made by some exponents out of very little, and Pauline prophecies for the church which is

the Body of Christ have been much confused with Messianic prophecies which are for Israel; especially those spoken by our Lord or appearing in the Book of Revelation, the Unveiling ...

Prophecies of particular interest to present believers are Romans 11:25-32, I Corinthians 15, I Thessalonians

4:13-17, II Thessalonians 2:5-12, II Timothy 3:1-5 and II Timothy 4:3-4; also Jeremiah 31:31-34, which is repeated in Hebrews 8:8-12. This latter prophecy concerning Israel is often quoted in theological

writings, and if the authors indicate they really do believe it, they can be accepted as fairly safe guides, for here is a prophecy so definite that its meaning does not admit any argument or dispute and is capable of complete verification when the fulfillment occurs. It is a prophecy obviously not yet fulfilled, for God has not yet imparted His laws to Israel's comprehension, nor inscribed them on their hearts, nor has He done so to any people on earth since the Ascension.

The Apostle Peter has clear words for the guidance (see **LIGHT**, page 2091)

Until now no Hebrew prophecies have been fulfilled which were not already fulfilled when Paul wrote II Thessalonians.

A Light in a Dark Place.....	2089
More Interest in Antichrist than Christ.....	2093
Prophetic Speculation.....	2093
The Seven Millennium Theory.....	2094
Prophecy Will Not Enable us to Prophecy ...	2096
The End of the World.....	2096

Bible Student's Notebook™

Paul Our Guide – Christ Our Goal

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This weekly publication (52 times a year) is dedicated to:

- the proclamation of the riches of God's abundant, exceeding grace (Romans 5:20; 11:6; Ephesians 1:7)
- the affirmation of God's purpose to save all mankind through the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (I Timothy 2:3, 4; 4:10; Titus 2:11)
- the "preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began" (Romans 16:25)
- true freedom and liberty apart from law (Galatians 5:1)
- the organic nature of the church, the Body of Christ (I Corinthians 12)
- the distinct message and ministry of Paul, the apostle to the nations (Romans 11:13)
- the importance of receiving all whom Christ has received (Romans 14-15)
- the recovery of rich Biblical truth that has too long remained hidden under the veils of traditionalism, prejudice, misunderstanding, and fear (Mark 7:7, 13).
- the completeness of the believer in Christ (Colossians 2:10), with
 - ... total forgiveness of sins (Colossians 1:14)
 - identity in His death, burial, and resurrection (Romans 6)
 - adult sonship position (Galatians 4)

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LIGHT (continued from page 2089)

of all students of this fascinating subject, to which, he says, we should "take heed in our hearts." That passage from II Peter 1:19-21 was translated as literally as possible by R.B. Withers in the following words:

And we are hearing, more confirmed, the prophetic Word, to which ideally you are doing, taking heed in your hearts; as to a lamp appearing in a squalid [dark] place, until what time the day should be dawning and the morning star should be rising; knowing this first: that no prophecy of Scripture is becoming its own explanation; for not by the will of men was prophecy carried on at any time, but carrying on by Holy Spirit talking through holy men of God.

When God resumes His dealings with Israel and one prophecy after another is then fulfilled, it will be impossible for the saints of that era to remain detached, but they will take comfort in realizing all this was foreknown to God ever since the beginning and that He is in full control.

This is a difficult passage, and to realize how very faulty an idea we can get from incorrect translation, this rendering should be compared with the *Authorized Version*.

Paul, in Romans 16:26, refers to some of his own statements as "prophetic Scriptures;" but Peter has reference to "the prophetic Word," which has a wider scope and includes the whole of Scripture.

There are two important lessons to learn from what Peter says in the above passage. The **first** is that the "prophetic Word" is as "a lamp appearing in a squalid place." Peter referred not to a powerful light but a lamp like then in common use, a little light only from a wick floating in oil, hardly brighter than a candle. It is sufficient to shed light on its immediate surroundings, and to guide us for a step or two on our way. It is *NOT* the type of lamp which illuminates a modern motorway. If we expect prophecy to light our way for years ahead, we expect in vain.

The book of Revelation is entirely within the time-series of Hebrew prophecy while we are, most definitely, entirely outside of it.

The **second** lesson is that we must not expect prophecy to be "self-explanatory." Indeed, the finest student will confess how difficult it is to explain clearly every aspect

of Bible prophecy. Some may like to prepare "charts" of the future, and no doubt we should have found it very convenient if God had set out a time-table for us, but that is *NOT* the way prophecy works, it is not a kind of glorified fortune-telling. It is a very limited light in a dark place, and its limitation is an invitation for our

faith to rest on Christ alone, and a challenge to believe what has been revealed.

It is also a challenge to us to search for revelation, and to have the divine patience granted to us to be satisfied when our search comes up against a blank wall. If prophecy were a detailed outline of history written in advance there would be no room for faith, since we could see all the way ahead. The righteous lives by FAITH ...

The present return of Jews to Palestine and the now existing state of Israel are not any fulfillment of Hebrew prophecy, so these by themselves do not indicate if the end-time may or may not be near. There are other indications apparent to the enlightened eye which may well indicate that the full complement of the Gentiles is soon to be realized, but since the precise time is a secret, it is something we cannot determine by any imaginary fulfillment of Hebrew prophecy.

When we say there are many general indications that the beginning of the end-time may be near, we hasten to add that they *ALL FALL SHORT OF PROOF*. Yet one comforting fact is clear and certain: God's wrath cannot come into operation as long as Romans 5 and

II Corinthians 5 remain present truth. Among its many other glories Romans states assuredly that we shall be saved from wrath through Him, and Corinthians underlines the fact of reconciliation. To all who come within the scope

of those provisions, this entirely precludes any future exposure to wrath ...

We must not speculate on what may or may not happen to the present state of Israel in the foreseeable near future. Even if it should involve a setback as ►

disastrous as those of the Dark Ages, that would have no real bearing on our own expectation. The fact remains that, until now, no Hebrew prophecies have been fulfilled which were not already fulfilled when Paul wrote II Thessalonians. It is not for us to prophesy, and if we attempt to do so we shall only swell the ranks of false prophets and disillusioned date-setters.

Many attempts have been made to interpret Revelation – some which are worthy of praise –but the book remains a vision or series of visions, some of which appear to be literal, though others may be figurative – a distinction by no means simple to determine. It is all *true*, but we are in no position to interpret its truth. That eminent scholar R.B. Withers once said that he was very skeptical of our ability *at present* to sort out the prophecies of the Apocalypse and the unfulfilled prophecies of the Hebrew Scriptures.

If we cannot claim unanimously to have accomplished such sorting out of the prophecies which are ours, how can we hope to do so with prophecies which are, after all, primarily Israel's? ... I would say that in these matters it is better to be too cautious than too rash. ...

Sir Robert Anderson pointed out from I Peter 1:11-12 that THE PROPHETS THEMSELVES who were inspired to foretell the Lord's coming "*inquired and sought diligently*" as to the meaning of their *own* prophecies. Tales of suffering mingled with visions of glory must have seemed to them as inconsistent and impossible to harmonize. Even the Lord's disciples, who were privileged to receive His own teaching and see the actual events pertaining to Him which appear to us now as literal fulfillments of Scripture, were baffled and perplexed. "*We trusted,*" they said, "*that it had been He which should have redeemed Israel,*" but the very death which SECURED THAT REDEPTION seemed to them as the grave of all their hopes ...

It was an enormous service that Bullinger did for us in showing conclusively that the Church which is Christ's body is altogether outside the scope of the Revelation, yet foolish attempts continue in misapplying the letters for the seven *ecclesias* of Revelation to the history of

Christendom. The book of Revelation is entirely within the time-series of Hebrew prophecy, while we are, most definitely, entirely outside of it. The whole of our position, our standing and our hope as the Body of Christ depend on this fundamental fact. If we abandon this position, no place remains for us in God's plan, for within the scriptural time-series there is room for only two alternatives: 1) Israel as God's covenant people;

or, 2) judgment for the entire world. Paul's evangel is entirely absent both from Hebrew prophecy and from Revelation.

Daniel's prophecy of the "Seventy Sevens" was

formerly thought to simplify matters which more recently we have found it does not. Research by the late Commander Steedman has shed much new light on this subject, which in turn tends to illuminate the forthcoming era of Israel's renaissance when they once again shall be *Ammi*, God's covenant people. From the time of our Lord's earthly ministry even until now they remain *Lo Ammi*, "*not My people.*" Thus, present attempts to fit Hebrew prophecy into the times of the Gentiles are contrary to all revelation. The whole matter should be treated with extreme caution and with due reverence, for the issues are far from plain.

Since those qualities of caution and reverence are often conspicuously absent from the efforts of those who profess to "explain" prophecy, we must be doubly careful to avoid any pretense of understanding things which are not now clear. We must carefully refrain from speculation, especially such foolish speculation as attempts to identify Roman Catholicism with Babylon. That sort of thing is dragging God's Holy Word down into the mud.

As we pause to reflect, if any people had been entitled to know "*the times and the eras,*" it would have been those eleven Apostles who remained before Pentecost;

but our Lord *explicitly denied* that information, even to them. It is hard to understand why any Christian should try to wrest from Scripture such information of God's *earthly* plans as He has withheld thus far even from His *earthly* people ...

Sir Robert Anderson once said that prophecy was not given so that we might be able to prophesy, but as a witness to God when the time of fulfillment comes.

Not one, not even one single event in the series of Hebrew prophecy has been fulfilled in the last 1900 years and longer.

Ever since the call of Paul, no Hebrew prophecy has been or is now in course of fulfillment.

Prophecy is a REVELATION, not an invitation to a guessing contest. This fact can be tested against such prophecies as have been already fulfilled, for many of them were by no means explicit beforehand but they became instantly plain when the time of their fulfillment had arrived.

Here as in all other matters relating to the understanding of God's Word, if we are on the wrong course it makes no difference to our direction whether we are ten yards or ten miles along the way: we are still going far astray.

It is a fact of history that not one, not even one single event in the series of Hebrew prophecy has been fulfilled in the last 1900 years and longer ... The Scriptures also confirm the fact that during the entire period while Paul's evangel has been in force the whole series of events which relate prophetically to Israel have remained in abeyance. That period constitutes a long gap as far as Hebrew prophecy is concerned, and it is only those who refuse to acknowledge Paul's special ministry who attempt to fill that gap with past or present imaginary fulfillments.

If we recognize and believe this scripturally testified truth, it serves greatly to fortify our faith and increase our understanding of God's Word. First it serves to reassure our minds that, ever since the call of Paul

no Hebrew prophecy has been or is now in course of fulfillment – not even Matthew 24 nor any part of Revelation.

This liberates us from any misplaced preoccupation with “*earthly things*” and enables us to “*seek that which is above, where Christ is*” (Colossians 3:1). IT DESTROYS THE MASS OF CONFUSION ARISING FROM FEAR AND ENABLES US TO VIEW TODAY'S EVENTS WITH A MEASURE OF DETACHMENT. When God resumes His dealings with Israel and one prophecy after another is then fulfilled, it will be impossible for the saints of that era to remain detached, but they will take comfort in realizing that all this was foreknown to God ever since the beginning and that He is in full control.

Meanwhile, “*God gives us not a spirit of timidity but of power and of love and of sanity*” (II Timothy 1:7), qualities so often found lacking in premature applications of Hebrew prophecy. For *us* the realization of Pauline prophecy draws nearer every day as we anticipate the “*shout of command*” (I Thessalonians 4:16, *Concordant Version*).

Treasures of Truth

Installment Five: June, 1972 (Abridged)

Reading, England

More Interest in Antichrist than Christ

When I first came to California, the late Dr. Arno C. Gaebelin wintered out here in Pasadena, and I went to visit him. He asked me how I liked California, and I replied, “I love it here, but it's very interesting that if I teach the Book of Revelation, I can fill the church (even during midweek service), but if I begin teaching the Epistle to the Romans, I can practically empty the church. I find there are people who will run all the way across this area to find out from a speaker just how many hairs are in the horse's tail in Revelation.” He then made a statement to me that I shall never forget, “Dr. McGee, you're going to find out in your ministry that there are a great many people more interested in Antichrist than they are in Christ.”

J. Vernon McGee (1904-1988)
Thru the Bible with J. Vernon McGee
Volume V, page 476

Prophetic Speculation

The folly of interpreters has been to foretell times and things by this prophecy, as if God designed to make them prophets. By this rashness they have not only exposed themselves, but brought the prophecy also into contempt. The design of God was much otherwise. He gave this, and the prophecies of the Old Testament, not to gratify men's curiosities by enabling them to foreknow things, but that, after that they were fulfilled, they might be interpreted by the event; and His own providence, not the interpreter's, be then manifested thereby to the world. For the event of things, predicted many ages before, will then be a convincing argument that the world is governed by providence.

Sir Isaac Newton (1642-1727)
Observations on Daniel and the Apocalypse of John

The Seven Millennium Theory

by – Otis Q. Sellers (1901-1992)

In the quarter century that preceded the year 1000 A.D. the minds of many were dominated by the idea that the year 1000 would mark “the end of the world.” There were no sound reasons for this belief. Its only support was that “1000” was a nice round number, and that it would be appropriate for God to end the world at that time. This view spread like a prairie fire ... but the year 1000 came and went, and nothing out of the ordinary happened.

Since that time, in the religious world, date setting has been the favorite occupation of many. These attempts to “fix the time” have, as a rule, been related to something called “the battle of Armageddon,” the second coming of Christ, and the beginning of the millennium. Men have set their dates, supported them by elaborate charts, and shouted them from the housetops. In the past two centuries thousands of men have set as many positive dates for the return of the Lord, but when the date arrived, nothing happened. Thus, on the basis of experience alone, a teacher of God’s Word should not be limited when he emphatically denies relationship to any other teacher who attempts to set a date for the end of the dispensation of grace, or for the second advent of Christ, or for the beginning of the millennium. I, for one, cannot extend sympathy to any man who claims to have knowledge of the times and seasons which is greater than that which the Lord Jesus gave to His twelve apostles (Acts 1:7).

In 1953 I wrote a study on this same subject repudiating the ideas of certain who were setting the year 2000 A.D. as being the date for the beginning of that glorious millennium of human history when Satan will be bound and Jesus Christ will be personally present upon the earth. Their theories were not new to me. I had first come upon them in 1923, and as a young student was momentarily intrigued by them. Yet after careful study I rejected them, feeling they were founded solely upon inferences and not upon any direct teaching in the Word of God. They were linking an erroneous human calendar with the errorless Word of God.

These theories hold that God’s complete program for the human race, so far as it is revealed, is to be worked out in seven millenniums; that is, in seven

one-thousand-year periods. It is held that from the creation of Adam to the beginning of the new heaven and new earth is to be exactly seven thousand years, and that the last of these would be the thousand years that follow the return of Jesus Christ. Since, according to the commonly accepted chronology, as established by Archbishop Ussher, nearly 6,000 years have now passed since the creation of Adam, this leaves little time until the first day of the seventh millennium begins. Since these men readily admit that there is a seven year period, the seventieth week of Israel’s seventy weeks, this now leaves just little time before the covenant is made that marks the beginning of that seven-year period, and for the complete setting of the stage for the acting out of the great drama of that seventieth week. Israel must be restored; the temple of God must be rebuilt. So, all of this means that an enormous amount now has to be accomplished soon. Could it be that the “*temple of God*” which the man of sin desecrates (Matthew 24:15; II Thessalonians 2:4) is jerry-built?

At the time I wrote on this subject in 1953, some of the brethren who were advocating this theory were then allowing 33 years for the setting of the stage, and others were allowing only 16, but both of these groups have now run out of years and their charts and schedules now mock them.

The major argument that was then, and still is, being presented for the beginning of the seventh millennium in 2000 A.D. is taken from II Peter 3:8. Here we read:

“But beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the LORD as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.”

There are some who see in this passage a mathematical formula, some sort of a code-breaker for determining when an event will take place. They think that God is here establishing fixed values. Then they go to the first two chapters of Genesis where they find God actively working for six days and resting on the seventh, and “presto,” this gives them the theory that God’s program for man covers seven days or seven thousand years; and since the seventh day was the Sabbath, it follows in their reasoning that the seventh one-thousand-year

period has to be the millennium. Now the flood-gates of imagination are opened and out flows outrageous and anti-biblical results.

I am not able to put my eye to the keyhole of a simple passage such as II Peter 3:8 and see the far-reaching propositions that these men claim they see. Furthermore, I know that what they are presenting is not taught in this passage, even when it is combined with the opening chapters of Genesis. I have studied and expounded many times the chapter in which this passage appears, and in it have found many truths such as:

1) A divine promise is as certain of fulfillment in a thousand years as it is in one day. A human promise always becomes weaker the longer it remains unfulfilled.

2) Time with God has none of the limitations that it has with us. With us a day is a day and a thousand years is exactly that.

3) A long time with God may be a very short time with us, and a short time in God's sight may be a very long one in ours.

4) God can either execute in a day or spread out over a thousand years any purpose of His mind or action of His hand.

5) In Psalm 90:4 we are told that a thousand years in God's sight are but as yesterday when it is past, even as a watch in the night. A "watch in the night" among the Hebrews would have been four hours. Therefore, a thousand years can be either twenty-four hours or four hours. Thus, the Spirit of God has set up a safeguard so that none would think He was establishing fixed values.

The proponents of the seventh millennium theory also hold that the seven days of Genesis 1 and 2 are typical of the seven millennia of earth's history, six of which have already about run their course, and that the creation week has a prophetic character. Yet if each day is examined as to its character, and the six one-thousand-year periods of human history are examined, it will be found that there is no correspondence in any of them. This is especially true of the seventh day when it is compared to the prophesied character of the personal presence of Jesus Christ for a thousand years – the time usually called the millennium.

On the seventh day God ended His work and rested (Genesis 2:1). This we are told is a foreview of the millennium, but when the facts are faced there is no correspondence, likeness or identity of character between these two.

Whatever the character of the millennium will be, it is not in any sense a Sabbath. This thousand-year period is inaugurated by the second coming of Jesus Christ. This coming will result in His *parousia* or personal presence for a thousand years ... His coming will not be in order to rest, but to begin a glorious new work. This event does not end God's work; it will mark the beginning of what is probably the greatest period of divine effort. In this thousand years, Christ will work. It will not be a Sabbath for God, and it will not be a Sabbath for man ... The millennium has no correspondence with the seventh creation day when God rested.

Space does not permit the examination of other passages which are called into the witness box to give testimony in support of this theory. Nevertheless, when these passages are carefully examined, it becomes plain that they have been misinterpreted and do not support the theory being advocated. One of these is Hosea 6:1-2 where the people of Israel say,

Come and let us return unto the LORD: for He hath torn, and He will heal us: He hath smitten and He will bind us up. After two days will He revive us: in the third day He will raise us up and we shall live in His sight.

The "one day equals a thousand years" equation is applied to this passage, and in order to make it come out right these "two days" or two thousand years are started with the birth of Christ. However, it is my conviction that these two days are two twenty-four hour periods that begin with God's assumption of sovereignty and Jesus Christ's unveiling. Israel will then know the One whom they have so long rejected, and this will begin two days of mourning and depression as they wait to discover what will happen to them. It is not until the third day of divine rule that they are revived and begin to live in His sight.

Seed & Bread
Issue #92 – 1978

Prophecy Will Not Enable Us to Prophecy

Note that a right understanding of the prophecy will not enable us to prophecy. That is not the purpose for which it was given.

But it will prove a sufficient safeguard against error in the study. Notably it will save us from the follies into which false systems of prophetic chronology inevitably lead those who follow them. It is not in our time only that the end of the world has been predicted. It was looked for far more confidently at the beginning of the sixth century. All Europe rang with it in the days of Pope Gregory the Great, and at the end of the tenth century the apprehension of it amounted to a general panic.

It was then frequently preached on, and by breathless crowds listened to; the subject of every one's thoughts, every one's conversation. ... Under this impression, multitudes

innumerable, having given their property to monasteries or churches, traveled to Palestine, where they expected Christ to descend to judgment. Others bound themselves by solemn oaths to be serfs to churches or to priests, in hopes of a milder sentence on them as being servants of Christ's servants. In many places buildings were let go to decay, as that of which there would be no need in the future. And on occasions of eclipses of sun or moon, the people fled in multitudes for refuge to the caverns and the rocks. (Mosheim, cited by Elliott, Edward B.; *Horae Apocalypticæ* (3rd Ed.), 1, 446: and see also ch. 3, pp. 362-376.)

Prophecy is not given to enable us to prophecy, but as a witness to God when the time comes.
– E.B. Pusey, *Daniel*, p. 80.

Sir Robert Anderson
The Coming Prince
Chapter 1

The End of the World

No period in church history, or perhaps in any history, or in any country, presents a darker picture than Christian Europe at the close of the tenth century ... all mankind were panic-stricken ...

But if ever man might be forgiven the dream of believing that the end of the world was come, it was then. The clergy preached it, and people believed it, and it rapidly spread over all Europe. It was boldly promulgated that the world would come to an end when a thousand years from the Savior's birth were expired. From about the year 960 the panic increased, but the year 999 was looked upon as the last which anyone would ever see ...

The ordinary cares and employments of this life were given up. The land was left untilled; for why plough, why sow, when no one would be left to reap? Houses were allowed to fall into decay; for why build, why repair, why trouble about property, when a few months will put an end to all terrestrial things? ... Large sums of money

were given to the churches and monasteries, as if to secure a more favorable sentence from the supreme Judge. Kings and emperors begged at monastery doors, to be admitted as brethren of the holy order; crowds of the common people slept in the porches of the holy buildings, or at least under their shadow ...

The day of doom drew nearer and nearer. The last evening of the thousand years arrived: a sleepless night for all Europe! Imagination must fill up the doleful picture. But in place of some extraordinary convulsion, which all were tremblingly waiting for, the night passed away as other nights had done, and in the morning the sun shed forth its beams as peacefully as ever ...

The close of the first thousand years of the church's history were the darkest day ... in the annals of Christendom.

Andrew Miller (1810-1883)
Short Papers on Church History (1873)
Pages 383-385