

SABBATH THOUGHT 2024-07-20—THE THIEF IN THE NIGHT

May God bless you on His Sabbath day!

In what is known as the Olivet prophecy, Jesus told the disciples of the many events pertaining to the Time of Sorrows and the Great Tribulation. Along with Revelation, Matthew chapter 24 is one of the best known and quoted in the entire Bible. Understanding prophecy has been a primary interest for many in the *ekklesia*, but that was not the main message of Jesus Christ. He focused on the coming Kingdom of God¹.

A significant portion of the Bible contains prophecy. In many instances, prophecy is proof of God. Any significant event, such as the birth of Jesus Christ, recorded in advance of the actual occurrence is beyond the capability humans through their own reasoning. Such things can only come from God.

Proof of God, however, is only one reason for prophecy. The other reason is so that the *ekklesia* are "**redeeming the time**, because the days are evil." (Eph. 5:16). Our physical lives will either end in death or at the return of Jesus Christ. Regardless of which occurs first, all physical life is temporary. For those who are called, their eternal judgment of life or death is fixed at their physical death or when Christ returns. Knowing there is limited time, the saints have a serious task ahead of them.

Today, interest in prophecy is to try to predict the timing of the "last days"—the events leading up to the return of Jesus Christ. Many have spent years looking into this, me included. However, I came to a point where I put it aside for the most part. Why? I realized that if the return of Jesus Christ was imminent, I was distracted and not preparing spiritually. I needed to be focused on growing and becoming agape love and being zealous for good works.

Besides all that, God put a limit on being able to predict the timing of prophetic events. Jesus concluded describing the major prophecies in Matthew 24 for the end times with this admonition:

MATTHEW 24:42-44 "**Watch therefore**, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming. 43 "**But know this, that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched** and not allowed his house to be broken into. 44 "**Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.**

Is this telling us to watch in the sense of connecting prophetic events with the New World Order, wars, earthquakes, etc. that plague the world today? If so, then why did Jesus say "**IF**" the master of the house knew when his house would be broken into then he would have prevented it? Clearly the master of the house could NOT know when the thief would come. Jesus left no doubt when He said NO ONE WILL KNOW when the thief comes. The only solution to preventing the thief is to ALWAYS "**be ready**" for him. That does not mean to be continually 'updating' prophetic speculation with current world events. It means to prepare our *spiritual* house so a thief *cannot* break into it and steal. In the Bible, a house or temple is symbolic of a person's body. So, what would a thief want to steal from a spiritual 'house'? Spiritual salvation. How does anyone prepare and protect their spiritual house? Paul gave the classical answer in Ephesians 6:10-18 with the metaphor of the

¹ Refer to the [Sabbath Thought 2024-06-29—Preaching the Gospel](#).

armor of God by which one defends against the Adversary. But even that still requires maintaining a watchful guard. Notice what he says AFTER putting on the armor:

EPHESIANS 6:18 praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, **being watchful to this end [i.e., for this reason; that is, to be able to withstand in the evil day] with all perseverance and supplication** for all the saints—

What did he mean to be watchful “to this end?” He was not referring to the completion of something but to be watchful for a *reason*. What was the reason?

EPHESIANS 6:10-13 Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. 11 Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able **to stand against the wiles of the devil**. 12 For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual *hosts* of wickedness in the heavenly *places*. 13 Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able **to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand**.

Like Jesus, Paul warns us to watch or guard our spiritual ‘house’—be prepared to stand against the Adversary when (not if) he comes to steal salvation. Salvation is symbolized by the helmet in Paul’s metaphor, something worn on the head. It is certainly fitting, then, that Jesus described losing salvation as having something taken from a person’s head—their crown as mentioned in Revelation 3:11.

In all sense of the word, being watchful means to be focused on salvational matters, not prophetic events. Every word of Scripture is God-breathed²—the meaning of *inspired*—including prophecy. We should *not* ignore prophecy, history, and genealogies but personal salvation always comes *first*; otherwise, the others serve no purpose. Without agape love and good works there is no salvation.

Knowing the prophetic scriptures is important to not being deceived. But the revelation of prophecy only comes through a PROPHET of God:

AMOS 3:7 Surely **the Lord GOD does nothing, Unless He reveals His secret to His servants the prophets**.

Who is a true prophet of God?

NUMBERS 12:6 Then He [*the LORD*] said, “Hear now My words: If there is **a prophet among you, I, the LORD, make Myself known to him** in a vision; I speak to him in a dream.

DEUTERONOMY 18:21-22 “And if you say in your heart, ‘**How shall we know the word which the LORD has not spoken?**’— 22 “when a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, **if the thing does not happen or come to pass, that is the thing which the LORD has not spoken**; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid [*turn aside to hear*] of him.

To my knowledge, there have been no true prophets on earth for a very long time. The *ekklesia* are to test those who claim to have the answers to the major prophecies of the

² 2 Tim. 3:16.

Bible. Unless their credentials are established by God, everything they say is 100% human speculation. Only someone who prophecies of events that come to pass is a true prophet of God. Knowing the prophetic scriptures is important for that reason. Will there be a prophet of God in the end-times?

MATTHEW 17:9-11 Now as they came down from the mountain, Jesus commanded them, saying, “Tell the vision [*of the Kingdom*] to no one until the Son of Man is risen from the dead.” 10 And His disciples asked Him, saying, “Why then do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?” 11 Jesus answered and said to them, “Indeed, **Elijah is coming first and will restore all things.**

Jesus prophesied of one like Elijah the PROPHET coming before His return. No one has fulfilled that role to my knowledge. Until then, we are to watch and pray:

LUKE 21:34-36 “But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that Day come on you unexpectedly [*and find you unworthy*]. 35 “For it will come as a **snare [like a thief in the night]** on all those who dwell on the face of the whole earth. 36 “**Watch therefore, and pray always** that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and **to stand before the Son of Man.**”

Jesus said to watch our spiritual house and pray in order to be counted worthy to “escape all these things that will come to pass.” Escape what? Events of the Time of Sorrows or the Great Tribulation? Perhaps. Or was He referring to eternal death? What is “that Day” (v. 34) that is coming? It is the time of God’s judgment, both for the wicked and the saints. Judgment of the world brings the vengeance of the seven trumpets. Judgment on the *ekklesia* is “some to everlasting life, some to shame *and* everlasting contempt.”³ Escaping the trials and tribulations of this world is NOT important. Instead, it is VITAL to *escape* the “snare” of JUDGMENT coming upon the whole earth. While some could be taken to a place of safety, end-time prophecies tell of many saints who will be killed and martyred⁴. In fact, the fifth seal is *dedicated* to martyrs⁵. Watching means having our minds and hearts on matters of SALVATION, not being concerned with escaping physical suffering or death. It is so we can STAND before Jesus Christ! No matter how well someone might fit end-time events with prophecy, the Bible is certain about one thing⁶:

MATTHEW 24:36 “But of **that day and hour no one knows**, not even the angels of heaven, but **My Father only.**

ACTS 1:7 And He [*Jesus*] said to them, “**It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority.**”

1 THESSALONIANS 5:1-2 But **concerning the times and the seasons**, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you. 2 For **you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night.**

³ Dan. 12:2.

⁴ Rev. 17:6.

⁵ Rev. 6:9-11.

⁶ Also 2 Pet. 3:10.

No matter how well modern events can be correlated with prophecy, the return of Jesus Christ will be like a thief in the night so NO ONE will know the time of His return. This is unconditional because it is independent of prophetic understanding.

Those who are *not* watchful unto salvation are likened to being naked⁷:

REVELATION 16:15 “Behold, **I [Jesus] am coming as a thief**. Blessed is he who **watches**, and **keeps his garments**, lest he walk **naked** and they see his **shame**.”

Nakedness is a metaphor for being taken by surprise (such as by a thief in the night), exposed, and vulnerable. Being naked is also shameful because it is a state of unrighteousness⁸. The naked are unworthy of the Kingdom:

REVELATION 3:1-5 “And to the angel of the *ekklesia* in Sardis write, ‘These things says He [Jesus] who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars: “I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead. 2 “**Be watchful**, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect before God. 3 “Remember therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent. Therefore **if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come** upon you. 4 “You have a few names even in Sardis **who have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with Me in white, for they are worthy**. 5 “**He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments**, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels.

Today, God’s people are faced with the real possibility that Jesus Christ will return in our lifetimes but NO ONE can predict when He will return. Jesus was unequivocal—He said NO ONE KNOWS the “times or seasons” or the “day and hour.” That pretty well covers it. That will not even change during the Day of the Lord because there is some uncertainty even with the sign of the Son of Man⁹.

There is a difference between NOT KNOWING when something will happen and being SURPRISED when it does. No one knows when Jesus Christ will return but no one should be surprised when He does. Do not think of this message as a simple or uninteresting admonition only for babes in Christ. Doing so will lead to weeping and gnashing of teeth. Be watchful, be ready, and be prepared for the One who returns like a thief in the night to BRING salvation—not steal it—because even His NAME means salvation!

May God’s grace and peace be upon you!

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⁷ Also Rev. 3:18.

⁸ Rev. 19:8.

⁹ Matt. 24:30 and Luke 21:28.