SABBATH THOUGHT 2026-11-07—THE BEGINNING IS TOO LATE

May God bless you on His Sabbath day!

Many Christians are enticed by end-times prophecies. I dare say it is probably discussed more than any other biblical topic. It can be a very tantalizing subject but what is the purpose of end-times prophecies? God foretold the events at the end of this age for the same reasons that He told Amos that ancient Israel would be conquered by Assyria, which occurred a few decades after receiving the prophecy:

> AMOS 3:7 Surely **the Lord GOD does nothing, unless He reveals His [plan] to His servants the prophets**.

End-time prophecies are a warning to the converted and unconverted alike that God's judgment is coming. But it is concerning when people emphasize prophetic events rather than taking to heart the grave warnings of judgment. There are preachers who use prophecy to invoke fear as an incentive to convert people by promising an escape from the 'Great Tribulation'[1] based upon verses like this:

> LUKE 21:36 "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."

This was the conclusion of the Olivet Prophecy, which began with prophecies of deception along with wars, earthquakes, famines, and pestilences:

> LUKE 21:7-11 So they *[the disciples]* asked Him *[Jesus Christ]*, saying, "Teacher, but when will these things be? And what sign *will there be* when these things are about to take place?" 8 And He said: "Take heed that you not be **deceived**. For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am *He*,' and, 'The time has drawn near.' Therefore do not go after them. 9 "But when you hear of **wars** and commotions, do not be terrified; for these things must come to pass first, but the end *will not come* immediately." 10 Then He said to them, "Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. 11 "And there will be great **earthquakes** in various places, and **famines** and **pestilences**; and there will be fearful sights and great signs from heaven.

Jesus said "All these *are* the Beginning of Sorrows."[2] There will be wars and all manner of natural and weather-related events that wreak destruction on the earth. But those are not generally what concern the *ekklesia*; those things are listed next:

> LUKE 21:12, 16-17 "But before all these things *[deception, wars, earthquakes, famines, pestilences]*, they will **lay their hands on you *[the saints]* and persecute *you*, delivering *you* up to the synagogues and prisons. You will be brought before kings and rulers** for My name's sake. … 16 "**You will be betrayed even by parents**

[1] The Great Tribulation is the vengeance of God upon the modern nations that are descended from Israel.
[2] Matt. 24:8.

and brothers, relatives and friends; and they will put *some* of you to death. 17 "And you will be hated by all for My name's sake.

Christ foretold this Persecution of Saints who will be put on trial by Jews in the synagogues[3], imprisoned, interrogated by rulers, betrayed by family and friends, put to death, and hated by the world. These are not just a possibility; they will be the reality. But there is a problem with escaping the terrible events of the end-times. Read again the very first words:

> LUKE 21:12 "But **before all these things** *[the Beginning of Sorrows—deception, wars, earthquakes, famines, pestilence]*, they will … *[persecute you, try you in synagogues, imprison you, bring you before rulers, betray you, kill you, and hate you]*

Luke often adds details the other gospels[4] omit and he does so here, too. Persecution of Saints occurs BEFORE the Beginning of Sorrows[5] and continues through the Great Tribulation[6] right up to the Day of the LORD[7]:

> LUKE 21:25-28 "And there will be **signs in the sun, in the moon, and in the stars**; and on the earth distress of nations, with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring; 26 "men's hearts failing them from fear and the expectation of those things which are coming on the earth, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. 27 "Then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. 28 "Now when these things *[signs of the Day of the LORD]* begin to happen, **look up and lift up your heads *[the saints who are still alive]*, because your redemption draws near**."

Persecution of Saints is followed by the Beginning of Sorrows—the wars and natural and weather-related events brought about by God that cause terrible hunger, thirst, and disease. These will lead to the rise of the Beast Power and Great Tribulation—God's vengeance upon the modern descendants of Israel at the hand of the Beast. Finally, the Day of the LORD arrives when God exacts vengeance upon the world and destroys the Beast and all who follow him.

Do you see the problem with the idea that the saints will escape persecutions, trials, imprisonments, interrogations, betrayals, martyrdom, and hatred? These things come upon the saints BEFORE the prophesied end-times events begin! There are no prophetic signs preceding the Persecution of Saints. It starts before the Beginning of Sorrows and continues until the Day of the LORD. In fact, one entire seal of the Scroll of Lamentations & Mournings[8] is dedicated to the Persecution of Saints—the Fifth Seal:

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[3] Matt. 23:34.
[4] Luke 22:64 (Christ was blindfolded); 23:27-31 (Jesus talking to the "Daughters of Jerusalem); 24:13-27 (narrative of Jesus on the road to Emmaus); 10:25-37 (Parable of the Good Samaritan); et al.
[5] Matt. 24:3-9; Luke 21:8-19—Beginning of Sorrows (deception, wars, earthquakes, famines, pestilences).
[6] Matt. 24:15-20; Luke 21:20-24—Great Tribulation (God's vengeance upon modern Israel).
[7] Matt. 24:21-28; Luke 21:25-26—Day of the LORD (God's vengeance upon the world).
[8] Ezek. 2:9-10.

REVELATION 6:9-11 When He *[Jesus Christ]* opened the fifth seal, I *[John]* saw under the altar **the souls of those who had been slain** for the word of God and for the testimony which they held. 10 And they cried with a loud voice, saying, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" 11 Then a white robe was given to each of them; and it was said to them that they should rest a little while longer, **until both *the number of* their fellow servants and their brethren, who would be killed as they *were***, was completed.

The Sixth Seal describes the cosmic disturbances that are the prelude to the Seventh Seal (the Day of the LORD) so the Fifth Seal proves the Persecution of Saints will continue until Christ returns. It may be possible to predict the events of the Beginning of Sorrows and the Great Tribulation but why does it matter at that point? The same is true of predicting the return of Christ. It will happen "at an hour YOU do not expect."[9] All predictions will be wrong simply because God determined that no one can know. Maybe prognosticators will be wrong because they will slumber and sleep like the Ten Virgins or they will be deceived into thinking that Jesus "delays" His coming[10]. Regardless of why, the Bible records the unpredictability of the return of Jesus at least twelve times:

MATTHEW 24:36, 42, 44, 50 "But **of that day and hour no one knows**, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only. … 42 "**Watch** therefore, for **you do not know what hour your Lord is coming**. … 44 "Therefore you also be ready, for **the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect**. … 50 "**the master** of that servant **will come on a day when he is not looking for *him* and at an hour that he is not aware of**,[11]

MATTHEW 25:13 "**Watch** therefore, for **you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming**.

LUKE 21:35 "For **it *[Christ's return]* will come as a snare** on all those who dwell on the face of the whole earth.

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

1 THESSALONIANS 5:2, 4 For you yourselves know perfectly that **the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night**. … 4 But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so **that this Day should overtake you as a thief**.

2 PETER 3:10 But **the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night**, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up.

[9] Matt. 24:44.
[10] Matt. 24:48; Luke 12:45.
[11] Repeated in Mark 13:32-33, 35; Luke 12:40, 46.

> REVELATION 3:3 "… Therefore if you will not **watch, I *[Jesus Christ]* will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you**.
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> REVELATION 16:15 "Behold, **I *[Jesus Christ]* am coming as a thief**. Blessed *is* he who **watches**, and keeps his garments, lest he walk naked and they see his shame."

It will not matter if someone can predict end-time events. When they begin, the saints are already being hunted down and captured, persecuted, imprisoned, tortured, starved, afflicted, and killed. They are fleeing for their lives and simply trying to survive. No one will be concerned about end-times prophecies under those conditions. But what about the promise of Christ to the Philadelphia *ekklesia*?

> REVELATION 3:10 "Because you *[Philadelphia]* have kept My command to persevere, **I also will keep you from the hour of [temptation] *[or trials]* which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth**.

What is it that the Philadelphia *ekklesia* escape? They are kept from the "the **hour of temptation *[or trials]*** which shall come upon the **whole world**." The only event described as an *hour* that comes upon the whole world is the Day of the LORD[12], which is last in the sequence of the Persecution of Saints, the Beginning of Sorrows, and the Great Tribulation. So, does the Philadelphia *ekklesia* alone escape the Persecution of Saints? This is the only verse that might suggest it.

Consider the next verses that warn Philadelphians their crowns could be stolen by wicked PEOPLE. How? By giving in to temptations or trials—like all the *ekklesia* they must "**overcome the world**"[13]:

> REVELATION 3:11-13 "… **Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown.** 12 "**He *[all of the* ekklesia, *not just Philadelphia]* who overcomes**, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God," … 13 "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the *[ENTIRE] ekklesia*."

The requirements for salvation are the same for Philadelphians as the rest of the *ekklesia*. Even if they escape the Persecution of Saints, *how* do they escape? It does not say but could it be through martyrdom? Obviously there are saints alive at the return of Christ[14] but many are martyred and death is one form of escape. Are the Philadelphians those "under the altar who had been slain"[15] before the Persecution of Saints begins? But who is a Philadelphian? Only God can judge. Claiming that designation is prideful and arrogant that is not characteristic of Philadelphians.

Prophecies are a warning of judgment upon the world and an urgent plea to do works befitting of salvation for the saints. They describe threats to salvation that

[12] Matt. 24:42; Luke 21:35.
[13] 1 John 5:4-5.
[14] 1 Thess. 4:15-17.
[15] Rev. 6:9.

could make saints unworthy to "stand before the Son of Man,"[16] like the Foolish Virgins. Prophetic events will happen at God's direction but the saints must watch and be on-guard against the "thief" who would break into their spiritual "house" and steal salvation. The main threat is deception that is mentioned at least nine times[17]. Jesus cautioned not to be "weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life."[18] He is not concerned with physical sufferings and death but eternal salvation:

> MATTHEW 10:28 "[D]o not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather **fear Him *[God the Father]* who is able to destroy both soul** and body in hell.

Waiting until prophetic events begin to be fulfilled to "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling"[19] is too little, too late:

> ROMANS 13:11-12 And *do* this, knowing the time, that **now *it is* high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation *is* nearer than when we *first* believed**. 12 **The night is far spent, the day is at hand.** Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light.

We must ask ourselves, are we NOW expressing love for brethren, neighbors, and (especially) enemies and humbly praying for them?

> MATTHEW 5:43-44 "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' 44 "But I *[Jesus Christ]* say to you, **love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you**,

Are we NOW putting away anger, admitting our faults, and forgiving others even when others refuse to reconcile and treat us "spitefully?"

> JAMES 5:16 **Confess *your* trespasses *[or faults]* to one another, and pray for one another**, that you may be healed. …

Are we NOW being just, equitable, and fair with all according to the Law of God?

> MICAH 6:8 He *[the LORD]* has shown you, O man, what *is* good; and **what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?**

Are we NOW being generous to others with prayers, encouragements, talents, fellowship, and provisions?

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[16] Luke 21:36.
[17] Matt. 13:22; 24:4, 5, 11, 24; Mark 4:19; 13:5, 6; Luke 21:8.
[18] Luke 21:34.
[19] Phil. 2:12.

ACTS 10:2 *[The Centurion Cornelius was]* a devout *man* and one who feared God with all his household, **who gave alms generously to the people *[not a church organization]***, and prayed to God always.

[TS2009] 1 TIMOTHY 6:18 to **do good**, to **be rich in good works**, to **be generous**, **ready to share**,

2 CORINTHIANS 9:6-7 But this *I [Paul] say:* He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. 7 *So* ***let*** **each one *give* as he purposes in his heart**, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver *[giving to PEOPLE—next verse]*. 8 And God *is* able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all *things,* may have **an abundance for every good work *[unto others—does not require money]***.

Prophecies are not intended to be an intellectual pursuit:

GALATIANS 4:10-11 **You observe days and months and seasons and years. 11 I *[Paul]* am afraid for you, lest I have labored for you in vain.**

Signs of the end of the age are an urgent warning to prepare our hearts and be spiritually ready at the return of Christ:

2 JOHN 1:8 **Look to yourselves, that we do not lose those things** we worked for, but *that* we may receive a full reward.

1 TIMOTHY 4:16 **Take heed to yourself** and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this **you will save both yourself** and those who hear you.

LUKE 21:34 “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 [suddenly] *[and catch you unprepared]***.

May God’s grace and peace be upon you!

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