

## Newsletter February 2017

In our December 2016 newsletter, we explored Daniel's prophecy of seventy weeks in which we placed particular emphasis upon the seventieth week (i.e, seven years), which is just prior to the return of the Messiah (i.e. the Christ) to establish his Kingdom age upon the earth. In last month's January 2017 newsletter, we explored the first portion of Jesus' Olivet Discourse as it is recorded in the Gospel of Matthew 24:4-44, which further explained this seven-year period and expanded our knowledge of conditions existing on earth near and at the end of the age, which coincides with Jesus' return to the earth.

As we observed in both of these newsletters, God has placed a vast span of time between Jesus' ascension into Heaven and the moment of his physical return to the earth at the end of this seven-year period. This vast expanse of time was unknown to the Jew living in Jesus' day; they saw the expected arrival of their Messiah and the establishment of his Kingdom age as a singular event. The precise length of this span of time is known only to the mind of God the Father (cf. Mt.24:36). However, we clearly observe that this vast interval of time has already covered nearly two thousand years, and it presently appears to have no specific end. Nevertheless, as we observed in last month's newsletter when Jesus discussed the olive tree and its tender leaves, He indicated that there will be subtle signs visible to the watchful, which will indicate the approaching culmination of this present age within a climactic event-filled seven-year period.

Jesus had begun earlier to elude to various conditions characterizing this vast age through a series of parables that are recorded in Matthew Chapter 13. When his disciples asked Him why He spoke in parables, "He answered and said unto them, "Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given" (Mt.13:11). Inasmuch as the people of Israel had hardened hearts and dull ears they could not understand their deeper spiritual meanings, but his disciples having had their hearts and ears prepared by God during the time they had spent with Jesus were enabled to better understand the spiritual significance of his words (cf. Mt.13:14-17). Jesus expressed the erratic volatile nature of the human heart in the parable of a sower and in the parable of the tares (cf. Mt.13:18-26), wherein the Gospel would be impeded by the hardened human heart and choked out by secular demands of the world.

All of these earlier parables described a heavenly kingdom on earth that existed only in an immaterial spiritual aspect – its material prospect existing in a state of suspension during a long period in which its sovereign Lord was physically absent. The implications of those parables as to this vast interim age were as yet hidden to the minds of Jesus' apostles who consistently expected Jesus to establish the kingdom age within their lifetimes. We must note that following Jesus' resurrection from the dead and preceding his ascension, his apostles again asked Him if He was at that time going to establish his Kingdom age on earth (cf. Ac. 1:6). "And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power" (Ac.1:7). Again, the disciples were disappointed. However, their disappointment would soon turn into great joy inasmuch as they would soon experience and understand the great purpose for that vast age within the birth of the new-covenant Church some fifty days hence on the day of Pentecost.

At the outset we discovered that this interim church-age is to be characterized as a period of great enigmatic conflicts in two of Jesus' earlier parables: In the parable of the mustard seed He demonstrated how the simple truth of the Gospel of salvation would over time grow into a grotesque religious institution in which evil men would roost within its massive hierarchy like birds of prey to devour the truth. This aptly describes today's Temporal church at large as we have described it in many of our earlier newsletters. Again, in his parable of the leaven, Jesus warned his apostles about how even a small amount of evil hidden away within the body of Truth would eventually expand unchecked to corrupt the entire temporal church, rendering it totally apostate of the true faith (cf. Mt. 13:31-33; Newsletter October 2014). Consequently, the Church age would contain that which is true as well as that which is false, that which is good and that which is evil, and it would be populated with the godly and the satanic. It would harbor the wise and the unwise, the believer and the unbeliever, those who are faithful and true servants of our Lord as well as those who are hypocrites and obstructionists; all of which must exist side-by-side in today's Christendom until his true Church is taken up in the last days to be forever with the Lord (cf. Mt. 13:27-30; 1Th.4:16,17).

Having addressed the three questions of his apostles in his Olivet Discourse, which we discussed in last month's newsletter, Jesus turned his attention toward instructing them concerning the activities, moral responsibilities, and living conditions of those existing upon earth during this vast interim age – the central

feature of which would be the New-Testament Church. Up to this point in his discourse, Jesus had been speaking to his apostles as believing Jews who were awaiting the coming Kingdom age, but as He continues, He begins to speak to them as those who would soon become associated with Him in a radically new way. Only after the Church was born on the day of Pentecost following Jesus' ascension and the Holy Spirit had come to indwell his apostles, would it become apparent to them that something new and wonderful had come into being within which they were privileged to be its very first members as well as its ambassadors.

Returning now to the text of the Olivet Discourse, we find the apostles' instructions concerning the vast Church age beginning in Chapter 24, verse 45 and continuing through Matthew Chapter 25 – ending at verse 30. Again, Jesus chose to use the allegorical method of teaching. Each of the three parables in this text allude to his physical absence during this vast previously unknown age. “Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his lord hath made ruler over his household, to give them meat in due season? Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing. Verily I say unto you, That he shall make him ruler over all his goods” (Mt.24:45-47;cf Lu.12:42-44). Here the “household” represents those who are Christ's own – those who have been adopted into the family of God through a spiritual rebirth facilitated by the Holy Spirit. His valuable goods are the body of Truth, which He left with his apostles. The ruler of the household is the administrator of this Truth, whom God has charged with the responsibility of caring for and feeding his household. This charge is first applicable to his apostles, who laid the firm unchangeable foundation of the Truth, but it is also applicable to pastors and teachers who must carefully build upon it to increase its value for the Lord's redemptive work (cf. 1Co. 3:12-15). Those who do well in this service will receive honor and will be further enlightened and reenlisted to provide even greater service in the future.

“But and if that evil servant shall say in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming; And shall begin to smite his fellowservants, and to eat and drink with the drunken; the lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looketh not for him, and in an hour that he is not aware of, And shall cut him asunder, and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Mt.24:48-51;cf. Lu.12:45-48). This servant is obviously not a true believer, inasmuch as he deliberates in his heart that the Lord has indefinitely delayed his coming in direct opposition to Jesus' express promise to come again. Here we view the religious charlatan, which we find today both in and out of the temporal church. He makes his fellowship with the world and berates and abuses his fellow-servants within the household of God. When the Lord returns, this evil servant will not expect nor welcome Him. Consequently, he will be cut to pieces and go into perdition along with the hypocrite and other deceivers.

We turn now to the second parable, which depicts the temporal church at the time of the Rapture of the true Church residing within its greater assemblage. “Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom. And five of them were wise, and five were foolish. They that were foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them: But the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps” (Mt.25:1-4). The “bridegroom” represents Christ, the “lamps” represent Christian affirmation, the light from those lamps represents the light of the Gospel of Truth, and “oil” represents the Holy Spirit that fuels that bright light. The ten virgins are those who collectively make up the temporal church, which has within its congregations those who are truly Christ's own having been made wise through his Word, as well as many who are hypocritical nonbelievers, which lack wisdom because they do not have the Holy Spirit living within them. Nevertheless, all profess to be a true witness of Christ and his Gospel and say they are prepared and are looking forward to Jesus' return.

“While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept”(Mt.25:5). This informs us that even true believers will slumber and thus will be unaware of signs signaling Jesus' soon arrival. If, as we have put forth in our last two newsletters, the true Church will remain on the earth through the three-and-one-half-year reign of the antichrist, believers who insist that the Rapture must occur before the antichrist comes to power would inevitably fail to recognize this despotic world ruler as the antichrist. Inasmuch as biblical prophecy is nowhere explicit regarding a precise time within its overall chronology for the Rapture to take place, it is imperative that believers stay awake and on watch for the rapid fulfilling of biblical prophecy as we approach the final seven years of this era.

“And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him. Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps” (Mt.25:6,7). When Jesus returns for his Church, the entire

temporal church will go forward with their testimonies that speak of their betrothing love and faith in Him, but the foolish unbelievers discover that their lamps at first give forth but a feeble light because they have no oil to fuel them, and once the wick is burned up, they go out. "And the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil; for our lamps are gone out" (Mt.25:8). In desperation, the unsaved ask the saved to impart a portion of their true faith to them! To believe that this is possible would be tantamount to attaining salvation by association, a false doctrine commonly held by the unsaved in today's temporal churches. "But the wise answered, saying, Not so; lest there be not enough for us and you: but go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves" (Mt.25:9). The "sellers" are those who freely preach the Gospel. The Holy Spirit cannot be purchased with gold or silver (cf. Ac.8:18-20); it is a priceless gift of Himself, which God bestows upon those who thirst and hunger for righteousness. As we read in the prophecy of Isaiah, "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price" (Is. 55:1). At this late hour in which Christ comes for his Church, the purpose of the Gospel of redemption has been accomplished in the body of true believers, and the vast storehouse of God's grace, through which redemption from sin is possible, will be forever closed to the false professor.

"And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut" (Mt.25:10). The true Church, which is the beloved bride of Christ, had gone into his chambers where the eternal marriage is to take place. "Afterward came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us. But he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not" (Mt.25:11,12; cf. Mt.7:21-23). Their lamps remained empty and dark, for they had not sought to receive the Holy Spirit in season, and had thus remained unknown to Christ. "Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh" (Mt. 25:13;cf. Lu.12:40). This is a solemn call for the unbeliever to repent and receive salvation offered in Christ while there is still time to do so, but it is also a call for the believer to remain spiritually awake and on watch with great desire and expectancy for signs signaling Jesus' return.

We now turn to Jesus' third and last parable concerning the Kingdom of heaven in this interim age. "For the kingdom of heaven is as a man travelling into a far country, who called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods. And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one; to every man according to his several ability; and straightway took his journey" (Mt. 25:14,15; cf. Lu.19:11-27)). The word "talent" in this Scripture text actually refers to a weight of valuable property and not natural ability, as some may suppose. However, the natural ability of each man to invest the property for gain was considered when the gifts were imparted. When Jesus ascended to the Father, He bestowed spiritual gifts on men by means of the Holy Spirit (Ep.4:8) for the purpose of building up the Church and so to advance the interim Kingdom toward its full fruition at the end of the age. "Then he that had received the five talents went and traded with the same, and made them other five talents. And likewise he that had received two, he also gained other two. But he that had received one went and digged in the earth, and hid his lord's money" (Mt.25:16-18). The absolute refusal of the last servant to invest his master's property according to the best of his ability was an unconscionable act demonstrating the man's rebellious nature that directly opposed his master's interests.

"After a long time the lord of those servants cometh, and reckoneth with them. And so he that had received five talents came and brought other five talents, saying, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me five talents: behold, I have gained beside them five talents more. His lord said unto him, Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord. He also that had received two talents came and said, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me two talents: behold, I have gained two other talents beside them. His lord said unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord" (Mt.25:19-23). Here we find that these two men who had happily used their ability to further their master's work and property were rewarded for their faithfulness by giving them even greater things to preside over that they may fully share in the joy of their master's work.

"Then he which had received the one talent came and said, Lord, I knew thee that thou art an hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strawed: And I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth: lo, there thou hast that is thine" (Mt. 25:24,25). This servant attempts to blame his unfaithfulness on his master by impugning his character. "His lord answered and said unto him, Thou wicked

and slothful servant, thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I have not strawed: Thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine own with usury” (Mt.25:26,27). Sowing and reaping was the primary purpose for which the servants were employed that they may share in the joy of the Lord's work of salvation. This last man was never a true servant of his Lord. The other two men had faithfully and joyfully carried out this work while this man had flatly refused to even look upon the portion of the possession assigned to him. For this treacherous act of betrayal his master commanded, “Take therefore the talent from him, and give it unto him which hath ten talents. For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath. And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Mt.25:28-30).

At this point in his prophetic discourse, Jesus returns to his prophecy concerning the end of the age wherein He had earlier said, “And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other” (Mt. 24:30,31). As we said in last month's newsletter, these are elect Jews who have been scattered throughout many Gentile nations during the interim age. Although some nations have provided them refuge, others have persecuted and slaughtered them.

“When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory” (Mt.25:31). This will be the physical throne of David in Jerusalem at the beginning of the millennial age. “And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left” (Mt.25:32,33). The sheep represent those nations whose godly leadership have sought to honor Him and had heeded the Gospel of the coming Kingdom; the goats represent those nations whose leadership defied and perniciously denied Him his rightful place as King and had also abused his people.

“Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me” Mt.25:34-36). “Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me” (Mt. 25:37-40). In the context of this prophecy given to his Jewish apostles, Jesus' brethren are unquestionably those brothers after his flesh – the family of Israel into which He was born on the earth.

“Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels: For I was an hungred, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not” (Mt. 25:41-43). In blind ignorance these nations will deny that they have thus offended Him. “Then shall they also answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee? Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me. And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal” (Mt.25:44-46). Let every nation that hates and persecutes Israel and its chosen people take notice of this warning of their ultimate destruction by the spoken word of the Messiah at the end of the age. Only righteous nations will enter the millennial Kingdom.

Upon concluding this final discourse given to his disciples, Jesus unambiguously stated to his them that He would be betrayed and crucified during the upcoming feast of the Passover, which was but two days off (cf. Mt.26:1,2). “Then assembled together the chief priests, and the scribes, and the elders of the people, unto the palace of the high priest, who was called Caiaphas, and consulted that they might take Jesus by subtilty, and kill him” (Mt.26:3,4). Jesus' departure of which He had spoken was indeed near at hand in his victorious ascension into heaven (cf. Ac.1:0), which followed his atoning death by crucifixion and his glorious resurrection from the grave. © Arthur J. Smith February 2017