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"Are we nearing the end of the age and how close is Christ's return?"

By Rev Ivan Foster

When considering such a question as this, we must carefully bear in mind the words of the Lord Jesus Christ in Matthew 24:42: "Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come."

Setting a date upon the Lord's return is utter folly in the light of these words and even more so in the light of Mark 13:32. "But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father."

There are those who use this verse in Mark 13 as an argument against the study of prophecy since, they claim, even the Lord Jesus does not know the day of His return. Therefore it is useless for us to search the Scriptures for indications of when He will return, since He would not have been able to give us such information!

To me, such a notion that the verse is teaching that Christ is in ignorance of the day of His return is quite ludicrous and contrary to, indeed it is nothing short of a denial of, the truth regarding the deity and the Godhead of Christ.

The idea that Christ does not know the mind of the Father is not in keeping with His deity and His co-equality with the Father. Such a notion is contrary to the Saviour's own clear statements regarding His omniscience. "As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father," John 10:15. "All things are delivered unto me of my Father: and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him," Matthew 11:27 "For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son: that all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father. He that honoureth not the Son honoureth not the Father which hath sent him," John 5:22-23.

Would it not be strange indeed if the One to Whom is "committed all judgment" does not know the day and the hour when He "shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power," 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9?

I might say that I believe that the verb rendered "knoweth," in Mark 13:32, sometimes means to make known, or to reveal. The same Greek word translated in Mark 13:32 as "knoweth" is used in 1 Corinthians 2:2. There Paul says: "For I determined not to know" - or to make known, to expound - "any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified." If we use the word in the sense in which it is translated in 1 Corinthians 2:2, then Mark 13:32 could be read, indeed should be read: "That day and hour none makes known, neither the angels, nor the Son, but the Father."

The source of all knowledge

The Father has, from the beginning, known and ordained all things which shall come to pass. As the early believers prayed concerning the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus: "For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, for to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done," Acts 4:27-28. That 'determining' most certainly included the ordaining of the day of Christ's second advent.

The Father has made known His will to His Son regarding such future events and this is made very evident in Revelation 1:1. "The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to shew unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass; and he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John."

The Father made known to the Lord Jesus the "things which must shortly come to pass" (or as we should read it, "the things which must come to pass in a short period of time") in order that He, the Son, might



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"shew them unto his servants." It is not foolish or wrong to search the Scriptures for information regarding the last days for such is part of the information that the Saviour was given of His Father to share with His people.

Regarding the Saviour's words in Matthew 24:42 which state: "Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come," that has ever been the state of ignorance the believer has been in since the dawn of time. We have never known the appointed "hour" of Christ's appearing. However, I believe that such an ignorance will be gradually lifted as the day approaches. I think that there is a time of "making known" and it is referred to in Daniel 12:8-9. "And I heard, but I understood not: then said I, O my Lord, what shall be the end of these things? And he said, Go thy way, Daniel: for the words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end."

What Daniel was not permitted to know will be made known to God's people in "the time of the end." That surely is implied in the words: "the words are closed up and sealed **TILL** the time of the end."

But for now let us just consider that:

I. THE DAY OF CHRIST'S RETURN IS PRESENTLY KEPT HIDDEN FROM US

God has often kept matters hidden from His people. "But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory," 1 Corinthians 2:7. Such things were hidden from the prophets and the angels as Peter states. "Of which salvation the prophets have enquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you: searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow. Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; which things the angels desire to look into," 1 Peter 1:10-12. The word look here referring to the angels means "to stoop down". See John 20:11.

Is this not the very position the cherubims on the Ark of the Covenant are depicted to be in?

1. There is wisdom in keeping the precise details of Christ's return secret throughout former times. Uncertainty will keep believers in an attitude of constant expectation, and preserve them from carelessness. Is this not the very attitude the Saviour warned against in the parable He tells immediately after in verses 45-51? Note His words, "But and if that evil servant shall say in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming," Matthew 24:48. He knew that the times prior to His return would see much carelessness amongst the saints. Such is our wayward nature.

2. The secrecy therefore encouraged a close walk with God. The early believers never believed that Christ's return was imminent. There were events that must precede the return of Christ. Those events will take place within a $3\frac{1}{2}$ year period at the end of this age. The uncertainty regarding the precise moment of Christ's return promotes a living in readiness to meet Him. "But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness," 2 Peter 3:10-11.

3. However, the study of prophecy must not be overlooked. We must give attention to the unfulfilled prophecies of Scripture. Many Christians neglect this. We cannot be truly seeking for the Lord's return if we neglect prophecy. The Church that neglects prophecy cannot seriously be "looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God." Such a Church has left its first love. It is slumbering. The Saviour depicts the state of the church just prior to His return. "Then (that word links the time spoken of in these verses to the events surrounding the Second Coming in the previous chapter) 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



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their vessels with their lamps. While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept," Matthew 25:1-5.

Is that not how the Church is today? It is, generally speaking, most careless about the doctrine of the "last things". "For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning; and ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their lord, when he will return from the wedding; that when he cometh and knocketh, they may open unto him immediately. Blessed are those servants, whom the lord when he cometh shall find watching: verily I say unto you, that he shall gird himself, and make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them. And if he shall come in the second watch, or come in the third watch, and find them so, blessed are those servants," Luke 12:34-38. The "treasure" upon which the hearts of God's people are set today is not, sad to say, upon Christ and His return. Prayer meetings are neglected as are Sabbath services. Worldly activities hold out an allurements for many professing Christians and they are versed in the ways and habits and styles of the world!

Carelessness is a feature of this day among the flock of God!

4. Consider the earlier Church in its "first love" regarding this subject. Look at these verses:

"So that ye come behind in no gift; **waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ,**" 1 Corinthians 1:7

"For our conversation is in heaven; **from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ,**" Philipians 3:20.

"When Christ, who is our life, **shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory,**" Colossians 3:4.

"And the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God, **and into the patient waiting for Christ,**" 2 Thesalonians 3:5.

"That thou keep this commandment without spot, unbreakable, **until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ:**" 1 Timothy 6:14.

"Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but **unto all them also that love his appearing,**" 2 Timothy 4:8.

"For yet a little while, and **he that shall come will come, and will not tarry,**" Hebrews 10:37.

"Be patient therefore, brethren, **unto the coming of the Lord.** Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain. Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: **for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh,**" James 5:7-8.

"Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and **hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ,**" 1 Peter 1:13.

"But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, **when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy,**" 1 Peter 4:13.

"And **when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away,**" 1 Peter 5:4.

"Looking for and hasting unto **the coming of the day of God,** wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat?" 2 Peter 3:12

"Keep yourselves in the love of God, **looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life,**" Jude 1:21.

I have given many quotations from the New Testament Scriptures in order to illustrate just how much to the fore in the hearts and minds of God's people in the first century was the return of the Saviour. We watch for



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Him by studying prophecy. We thus show our affection and love. Paul said the Thessalonians, "Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things?" 2 Thessalonians 2:5. The "these things" Paul is referring to were those things mentioned in the previous verses where he was dealing with the subject of "the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him." He had already been teaching them these truths and was now going over them again and taking them further in their understanding of the doctrines of the "last things".

As to the general profitableness of studying prophecy, we can have no plainer authority than the apostle Peter's words -- "We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place," 2 Peter 1:19, and the apostle John's words in Revelation 1:3. "Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand." It is a wise and a blessed thing to study prophecy.

5. We need to note the closing words of the Saviour to His people. In Revelation 22:19-20 we read: "And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book. He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus."

There are more ways of taking away the words of the Saviour than by using a pair of scissors or a blue pencil. We can effectively "take away from the words of the book" by ignoring these words, denying them, contradicting them and acting as if they were never spoken. The penalty for that is great indeed.

II. AS THE TIME OF CHRIST'S RETURN DRAWS NEAR THE FACT THAT IT IS APPROACHING WILL BE REVEALED

1. That is surely implied in the book of Daniel. "But thou, O Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book, even to the time of the end: many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased. Then I Daniel looked, and, behold, there stood other two, the one on this side of the bank of the river, and the other on that side of the bank of the river. And one said to the man clothed in linen, which was upon the waters of the river, How long shall it be to the end of these wonders? And I heard the man clothed in linen, which was upon the waters of the river, when he held up his right hand and his left hand unto heaven, and swore by him that liveth for ever that it shall be for a time, times, and an half; and when he shall have accomplished to scatter the power of the holy people, all these things shall be finished. And I heard, but I understood not: then said I, O my Lord, what shall be the end of these things? And he said, Go thy way, Daniel: for the words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end." Daniel 12:4-9.

Daniel had seen and heard things the understanding of which was not for him but for a people in the future. The words were sealed "till the time of the end." That is a clear signal that the words will be unsealed at "the time of the end."

2. We see a parallel of this in the truth in the first advent. "And, behold, there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon; and the same man was just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel: and the Holy Ghost was upon him. And it was revealed unto him by the Holy Ghost, that he should not see death, before he had seen the Lord's Christ. And he came by the Spirit into the temple: and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him after the custom of the law, then took he him up in his arms, and blessed God, and said, Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: for mine eyes have seen thy salvation, which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel," Luke 2:25-32.

There were very precise prophecies regarding the coming of Christ as we may see in Daniel 9:24-27. "Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city, to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most Holy. Know therefore and understand, that from the go-



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ing forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the Messiah the Prince shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks: the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublous times. And after threescore and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off, but not for himself: and the people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary; and the end thereof shall be with a flood, and unto the end of the war desolations are determined. And he shall confirm the covenant with many for one week: and in the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease, and for the overspreading of abominations he shall make it desolate, even until the consummation, and that determined shall be poured upon the desolate." Daniel 9:24-27. The word 'weeks' refers to a period of 7 years. This is confirmed in Genesis 29:20 and 28. "And Jacob served seven years for Rachel; and they seemed unto him but a few days, for the love he had to her. . . . And Jacob did so, and fulfilled her week: and he gave him Rachel his daughter to wife also." Jacob's 'week' of service was a period of 7 years.

The words of Daniel refers to 69 weeks "from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the Messiah the Prince." That is a period of 483 years. This period indeed covered the time from the command to rebuild of the walls of Jerusalem until the time of Christ.

Doubtless, light was shed on this prophecy for Simeon just as it shone on Jeremiah's prophecy for Daniel in 9:2. "In the first year of his reign I Daniel understood by books the number of the years, whereof the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah the prophet, that he would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem."

The knowledge Simeon was granted was then shared with others of a like mind. "And there was one Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Aser: she was of a great age, and had lived with an husband seven years from her virginity; and she was a widow of about fourscore and four years, which departed not from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day. And she coming in that instant gave thanks likewise unto the Lord, and spake of him to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem," Luke 2:36-38.

There remains one week or seven years of the seventy weeks that Daniel spoke of that lie at the end of the age when once again the affairs of Israel and Jerusalem will be taken up by the Lord after the long time of His punishment and rejection which began when the sixty-nine year period ended - namely the crucifixion and rejection of their Messiah by Israel.

We are given a time when this last seven years of this age will begin, namely Antichrist's covenant with Israel. It is worthwhile quoting Daniel's words again. "And the people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary; and the end thereof shall be with a flood, and unto the end of the war desolations are determined. And he shall confirm the covenant with many for one week (period of seven years): and in the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease, and for the overspreading of abominations he shall make it desolate, even until the consummation, and that determined shall be poured upon the desolate."

He will break that covenant in the middle of that period of the final week or seven years and then will begin the "Great Tribulation" spoken of by the Saviour. "When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place, (whoso readeth, let him understand:) then let them which be in Judaea flee into the mountains: Let him which is on the housetop not come down to take any thing out of his house: neither let him which is in the field return back to take his clothes. And woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck in those days! But pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, neither on the sabbath day: for then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be," Matthew 24:15-21.

The TRIBULATION is followed IMMEDIATELY by Christ's return. "Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken: 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



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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," Matthew 24:29-31.

Paul confirms that the sign that will signal the revelation of the Antichrist, the Man of Sin is the erection of "the abomination of desolation", or an idol, in the temple of God in Jerusalem. "Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God. Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things? And now ye know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time. For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way. And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming," 2 Thessalonians 2:3-8.

The last three and a half years or "time, times and half a time", "forty and two months" or "a thousand two hundred and threescore days" - all these terms are employed by the Lord in His Word with the purpose of making clear just how long is the period He is speaking of. Despite this some very foolish men have sought to teach that the Lord is referring to a period of time very different from what He clearly and repeatedly states!

When therefore the Antichrist is revealed in Jerusalem we know that the time of the Lord's return is very near, just three and a half years away! Thus we will be in a similar position to Simeon.

3. The events in Jerusalem leading up to the end will be very clearly marked. There will be the ministry of the two witnesses taking place and such will be the nature of that ministry the whole world will know about it. "And I will give power unto my two witnesses, and they shall prophesy a thousand two hundred and threescore days, clothed in sackcloth. . . . and if any man will hurt them, fire proceedeth out of their mouth, and devoureth their enemies: and if any man will hurt them, he must in this manner be killed. These have power to shut heaven, that it rain not in the days of their prophecy: and have power over waters to turn them to blood, and to smite the earth with all plagues, as often as they will. And when they shall have finished their testimony, the beast that ascendeth out of the bottomless pit shall make war against them, and shall overcome them, and kill them. And their dead bodies shall lie in the street of the great city, which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified. And they of the people and kindreds and tongues and nations shall see their dead bodies three days and an half, and shall not suffer their dead bodies to be put in graves. And they that dwell upon the earth shall rejoice over them, and make merry, and shall send gifts one to another; because these two prophets tormented them that dwelt on the earth. And after three days and an half the Spirit of life from God entered into them, and they stood upon their feet; and great fear fell upon them which saw them. And they heard a great voice from heaven saying unto them, Come up hither. And they ascended up to heaven in a cloud; and their enemies beheld them. And the same hour was there a great earthquake, and the tenth part of the city fell, and in the earthquake were slain of men seven thousand: and the remnant were affrighted, and gave glory to the God of heaven," Revelation 11:3, 5-13.

The place of these activities is irrefutably given. "The great city, which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified." We should notice that these events conclude just before "the seventh angel sounded; and there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever," Revelation 11:15. That is the return of Christ and the establishing of His earthly kingdom. This is the day spoken of by Daniel in his unveiling of Nebuchadnezzar's dream in chapter 2 of his book.

"Thou sawest till that a stone was cut out without hands, which smote the image upon his feet that were of iron and clay, and brake them to pieces. Then was the iron, the clay, the brass, the silver, and the gold, broken to pieces together, and became like the chaff of the summer threshingfloors; and the wind carried them away, that no place was found for them: and the stone that smote the image became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth. This is the dream; and we will tell the interpretation thereof before the king. . . . And



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in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever. Forasmuch as thou sawest that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it brake in pieces the iron, the brass, the clay, the silver, and the gold; the great God hath made known to the king what shall come to pass hereafter: and the dream is certain, and the interpretation thereof sure," Daniel 2:34-36, 44-45.

So, as the enlightened Bible believer looks upon these events in Jerusalem he will know very clearly just how close is the end of the age and the return of his Saviour.

Ivan Foster.

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