

UNDERSTANDING THE TIMES WE'RE IN

Expect the Unexpected

Light on the Rock Dec 2008

by Philip Shields

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SUMMARY: The recent global economic melt-down and historic win of Sen. Barack Obama as our next president, combined with growing crises in the Middle East and ongoing Islamic extremism, have all combined to cause renewed interest in end time prophecy. Are we within a few years of the return of the Christ? What should we be focused on? Today's sermon discusses recent world events in light of prophecy and discusses our priorities in these last days.

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Greetings, brethren. Have you been watching the news lately? And have you been watching your relationship with the Almighty lately? You'll see why I pose those 2 questions together shortly. Where are we in terms of end time prophecy? How many years could be left, before Messiah returns in glory, visible in the clouds of heaven? Everyone wants to know.

Is it even important to know where we are in prophecy – at least approximately? My answer may surprise some of you.

Are we really within 5-10 years of the whole world making war against the saints, and the time of trouble worse than the world has ever seen? It seems clearly so to many of you, and not clearly so to others. One thing is clear: the Bible says it will be “sudden destruction” when it does happen. Frankly I think we all wish our King were here now, right now. But if we end up having more than 5-7 more years, will we remain faithful and become even more zealous – or lose heart and become lethargic?

Certainly we also want to find the right balance.

- On one hand, **Amos 5:18-20** warns us not to be overly desiring “the day of the Lord”. He says the end will be like fleeing from a lion, only to run into a bear (Amos 5:19).
- On the other hand, we are also warned not to be blasé about it as we conclude by our actions, or inaction, that “The Lord delays His coming” (Matthew 24:48-52; 2 Pet. 3:3-9). Ironically, even Yahshua (or Yeshua, the name Jesus was actually known by) says in Matthew 25 – “while the bridegroom was delayed...” (Matthew 25:5).

It is said that one third of Scripture is devoted to prophecy. So we ignore it at our peril. But is there an even higher priority for our attention than prophecy?

Today we'll focus on current world events in the light of Bible prophecy – and then see what scriptures says our focus really needs to be on, even as we remain alert to our relationship with God as well as being aware of world conditions and events.

I feel I see a danger among so many watching prophecy and the news: we're trying to figure out what's about to happen based on what we hear or see in current world news. But how quickly can things change? As recently as 1980, who could have foreseen the unification of Germany? Or even just 15 years ago, who could foresee the dramatic powerhouse that China is becoming?

If there are more than 10 more years before the return of Christ, and I feel there definitely could be more than 10 more years – or not – what else could dramatically change? Many of our expectations and predictions could be out the window.

How fast can things change on the world scene? Here are a few ideas:

- a major terrorist attack can change entire economies and international relationships
- One assassin's bullet, killing a leading world figure, can start a world war. Remember how one bullet in Sarajevo, Yugoslavia sparked World War 1?
- a series of cataclysmic "acts of God" - - major earthquakes, tsunamis, hurricanes, and volcanic eruptions – especially if in major countries, can change everything overnight.
- The sudden death of certain world leaders – whether by natural causes or otherwise – can certainly change the world picture very quickly.

We could go on and on. We must expect the unexpected. We must look where we're not already looking. We must most of all, have a close relationship with Almighty Yahweh so we're in HIS safe hands when all things begin to come to final climactic close before the dawn of the new era under Christ.

THE SONS OF ISSACHAR

Please turn to 1 Chronicles 12. There we have a fascinating verse that bears on what we're discussing.

1 Chron 12:23 – listing the groups who came to support David as king....

"These are the numbers of the soldiers ready for battle who joined David at Hebron. They came to help turn the kingdom of Saul over to David, just as the LORD had said."

It goes on to list those who showed up. Now jump to verse 32, 1 Chron 12:32. Very interesting:

1 Chron 12:32

"of the sons of Issachar *who had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do*, their chiefs were two hundred; and all their brethren were at their command;"

They understood the times they were in. The Hebrew means exactly that. But what is intriguing is that it goes on to say: and "to know what Israel ought to do".

Though we will not know the exact day or hour ahead of time, God's people should understand the times we're in, as much as the sons of Issachar did in their day. We're assured of that in Daniel 12:8-10, where it says the wise will understand.

Who are the wise? Those who fear God and accept the gift of Christ – who becomes for us our righteousness and wisdom (1 Cor. 1:30). Understanding comes from God. The arch-angel Gabriel, for example, was sent to Daniel to give him understanding. Several times the angel says "Daniel, understand...." That shows us that God wants us to have understanding of the times, and not be guessing. Please study Daniel 8:16-17; 9:22-23, 25; Daniel 10:11-14, etc. Daniel sought to understand (Dan. 10:12).

In fact Daniel 11:33 says those who have understanding will instruct many.

So keep in mind that there is this balance: God wants us to understand, we should understand – but keep all things in their correct priority.

I asked a friend recently what he thought of recent events in light of world prophecy, and he said he gave up being a prophet a long time ago. I guess after all, we are a “non-prophet” organization aren’t we? Kidding aside, we actually should be people of understanding, if God gifts us with insight into world events and Bible prophecy. Just as Yahweh can shut our eyes so we cannot see, and our understanding – He can also open our eyes and our understanding if He so wills it (Isa. 44:18). David prayed for understanding (Ps. 119:27) and that’s probably a good example for us.

Are we men and women of God who understand the times we are in? Do we know what we should be doing? And how does all this relate to our attitude toward prophecy? How excited and focused should we be studying prophecy, trying to understand where we are

What I’m going to focus on today are these points:

- How important is it to spend a lot of time on trying to decipher prophecy? Yes we should understand. But how important is it to understand all the exact details? Can we?
- Will God reveal to us what we need to know even if we don’t have the technology to keep up with all the news?
- What is it we are to be “watching”, when scripture says “Watch ye therefore”?
- We’re really good at insisting on a particular series of prophetic scenarios, as if the Almighty somehow is beholden to our opinion of how the end will all transpire. God will not be boxed in, however to our ideas, regardless how confidently and loudly we proclaim our prophetic scenarios. So I’m going to encourage listeners to “think outside the box” when it comes to prophecy. Expect the unexpected.

[Track 2] WHERE ARE WE IN WORLD NEWS? RECENT WORLD NEWS

Look at what’s been on the news lately and what’s been happening lately around the world:

- The biggest worldwide economic melt-down since the Great Depression of the 1930’s, and we’re possibly only at the start of an even bigger collapse. Some feel we are perched to fall into a greater Depression than the 1930’s ever saw.
- Millions of people all around the world have been thrown out of work. Hundreds of thousands have already lost their homes in default. This seems to be spiraling downward very rapidly.
- The historic election of Barack Obama and many more from his party will definitely bring what he promised: change. I’m a conservative, but I will now pray for and honor the president-elect God has given our country (see Rom. 13:1-3). Recent news is that the country seems to have high expectations of Mr. Obama and he enjoys the highest satisfaction level at this early point. But don’t forget Mr. Obama is at heart a liberal, and the country will undoubtedly move decidedly left in the next four years, probably including more relaxed programs that will be pro-abortion and pro-gay. Abortion kills a living, human fetus with a beating heart --and it is murder. Let’s speak out on this as God’s people.

- The \$750 billion bail-out now looks like it could surpass 7 or 8 trillion before it's done, in terms of bail-outs and guarantees and loans. Is that even counting the cost of major health care reform? The country is broke already – and surely all this spending right now could bring on a great Depression, rather than avoid it.

How big is this bail-out being proposed? Listen carefully, as this will stagger you: If you add up the entire costs so far for the Iraq war, the Vietnam war, the cost of the Kennedy space program to be first to the moon, add to that the Marshall Plan after world war 2, add the Louisiana Purchase, the Purchase of Alaska, and even FDR's "New Deal" program – all that combined comes to less than half the expected \$7-8 trillion cost of this bail-out. Everything I just listed came to \$3.4 trillion. Also keep in mind, many other countries are taking similar steps around the world – even China, even UK, Germany, France, Spain -- in a desperate effort to stave off worldwide depression.

- The world grows ever more dangerous. Mumbai, India just suffered a devastating but cowardly terrorist attack. When armed young men start shooting down unarmed women and children, and men who did them no harm – this is cowardice. Iran is poised to have a nuclear weapons capability soon. Should Israel try to take out the nuclear reactor sites unilaterally? Would President-elect Obama allow it, or support it? It's worth watching. And now, as I write this, Gaza militants are launching 80-100 rocket attacks across Israel's border. Any country in the world would retaliate with force. So watch what happens here.
- Are we already in the time described by the Bible "as in the days of Lot" or like Sodom? So far, when put to the actual voters, the nation is still voting *against* including homosexuals in the definition of marriage. That's hardly yet as bad as Sodom, where an entire city surrounded Lot's house demanding he release his guests so they could "come to know them". I think we're getting close – and I know in some sectors of the USA and around the world, it is as bad as, or worse than Sodom. But I don't think we have yet reached the point where sin is filled to the full. There are still many people who are caring and giving and voting for Biblical marriage.
- We're watching a collapsing housing market. Millions are "upside down" on their mortgages – owing more than their house is worth. One in ten are either behind in their mortgages or about to lose their homes to foreclosure.
- Millions more have lost trillions of dollars in their investments and retirement funds, in which they trusted for their retirement years.
- We're witnessing the rising power, influence and wealth of China and India, plus the middle-eastern Arab Islamic nations as well. They hold billions and billions of US Dollars and are poised to powerfully influence the direction the world takes in the years ahead. By 2024, China's economy is expected to surpass that of the USA and Europe combined. In the meantime the power, influence, wealth and prestige of the USA and UK plummet. Russia is stirring. India will become an economic powerhouse in time also, I believe.
- President-elect Obama has also vowed to review and probably cancel many of the emergency rules in effect that have allowed us to wiretap suspected would-be terrorists – even though the current policy was what allowed the UK and USA to be able to derail the plans to blow up 10 jetliners over the Atlantic, remember. Other plots have been foiled.

But in the name of civil liberties, I suspect we will see terrorism have a much freer hand in the coming months and years. The result could be disastrous. We know he's likely to shut down Guantanamo Bay and bring the detainees to the USA for trial and possibly even release many of them *right here in the USA*. That would be crazy, in my opinion.

- I believe we'll see the economic crisis become an excuse for more Big Brother government – even someday a “police state”, right here in the USA, sooner or later. Do not be lulled to sleep. “Bail out” is just “doublespeak” for nationalizing major banks and industries. You watch. Yep, I've just said it. What George Orwell described in his novel “1984” with his character Winston Smith, can be our reality in the near future. It's already reality in much of the world. Big Brother watching your every move; meanings of words twisted so the Ministry of Truth was all about lies. The Ministry of Love was mean and hateful. It was a time of “doublespeak” and “doublethink”. In the novel – and we see it being played out in many nations already – the population heard what the government wanted them to hear. That's why I say we have to be cautious about much of what we even hear in the news. In “1984”, it was dangerous to ever speak out and so it got to the point where it wasn't worth fighting Big Brother any longer. I think it is also so unfortunate that the term “big brother” has come to mean a totalitarian dictatorship – like Stalin – when the true, loving Big Brother is the Son of God: Jesus the Christ. But He will not be anything like the Big Brother Orwell described.
- The definition of “hate crime” could be more broadly defined under President-elect Obama's leadership. I suspect over the years it will be harder and harder for me or anyone to speak out boldly on the Biblical view of abortion, homosexuality and other issues. “Hate crime” appears very one-sided to me. It's OK for liberals and gays to smear and even attack Christianity, especially conservative evangelical Christians, but they sure don't like it if we say anything about their lifestyle. Ditto for Islam. Perhaps any time we denounce homosexuality, or getting abortions as sins, we could find ourselves being slapped with a “hate crime”. On top of that, 57 nations, including the Moslem nations, are trying to get the UN to pass a resolution to make it a crime to say anything negative about Islam or to convert any Moslem to Christianity. It's called the “Defamation of Religions” act. It's about to be voted on. What the Christian nations don't seem to realize is that in the fine print all of this is just a front for being able to say what you want about Christianity – but not the other way around. Be watching this.
- I believe the time is coming when it will also be a “hate crime” to ever preach that the ONLY way to salvation is through the name of Jesus the Christ. Watch for this. If a one-world religion appears, it may be very difficult to actually practice active Christianity and to be professing Yahshua – or Jesus – as the Messiah. Oh, it's OK for Moslems to proclaim 5x a day that the only true god is their moon god Allah and Mohammed is his prophet – but it could become harder and harder for Christians to get away with saying the only way to salvation is through Jesus the Christ. It's already hard for our military chaplains to openly preach the name of Jesus.
- Watch for more and more signals for one world government and a new world order. Watch for labels like “solidarity”, sharing the wealth, one world in harmony and unity, and so on. These are all necessary precursors for the very end time one world Beast power to arise.

We don't know what actually will transpire. But expect the unexpected.

[Track 3]

WORLD BECOMING RIPE FOR NEW WORLD ORDER AND NEW WORLD RELIGION

Because of all the above and more, there will be a growing sense of worldwide angst, anxiety, a searching – around the world. I believe billions of people will soon be looking for someone to lead the world out of the mess we're in now. We're ripe for the appearance of the "Man of Sin" and the "Beast power". The stage is being set. It may take time for conditions to "ripen" just right – but we're getting there. Be watching for this too.

When this new one world leader appears, it will be sudden, surprising, unexpected, and he and his system will appear to have survived a deadly wound of some kind – whether literal, economic, or military wound – only time will tell (Rev. 13:3, 12). This one world system will be all encompassing, so that if you don't subscribe to it, you won't be able to buy or sell – but if you do become a part of it, woe be to you who see and who come under that system, according to God's word. All this is described in Revelation 13.

Pray for understanding of the times and insight to see what God wants us to see in these dangerous times. In league with him will be a super religious leader who may also bring in one world religion. Many who've spoken on prophecy over the years have assumed the global world religious leader will be a future Pope, or at least Catholic. That may or may not prove right. I personally feel the end time false Prophet could be a very, very nice person on the outside who will release a new religion that incorporates aspects of most of the world's major religions, so everyone can subscribe to it. However Christians won't be able to praise the name of Jesus, or Yeshua.

Expect the unexpected. Look for all possibilities – and then some.

Are we ready for this to come about perhaps in the next 5-7 years? I personally think it could, but I'm not banking on it. We have to *be* ready for any eventuality however. And remember what I said earlier: an assassin's bullet, a major terrorist attack, major natural disasters—can speed things up dramatically.

This end time false prophet will have miracle working powers so profound that he comes close to being able to even deceive God's Elect, God's people (Matthew 24:24). Almost. Daniel 11:31-36 speaks of a time when a great leader will speak words so smooth, so cunning, that even some of the wise will stumble and fall prey to him.

Are we ready for these 2 end-time anti-Christ leaders to appear very soon? I don't yet think so – but want to remain alert to *any* possibility. For them to almost deceive even the elect, either the elect brethren are sound asleep – and many will indeed be – or perhaps it also indicates to us that the coming great political and religious leaders will be so persuasive, so likeable, so deceptive because of the good miracles, the good deeds, the loving words they speak – that they'll be seen as saviors of the world. The world falls in love with them! By contrast, the last two witnesses of God (Rev. 11) are doing miracles that cause pain and suffering to the world – famines, droughts, water turned to blood, plagues imposed whenever they wish, death to their attackers, and so on. That's what Rev 11:5-6 says!

Which duo will be more appealing? The Two Witnesses – or the Beast and the False Prophet?

I personally suspect that we are going to have further major worldwide financial and even natural disasters that will set the stage for the one world leader. He will appear to have saved the day, and many will see him as the new Messiah. He will actually blaspheme the true God of heaven (Rev. 13). Who is this man? Is he on the scene already? He could be! Pray for eyes to see.

Expect the unexpected. If we could figure everything out, why are we advised over and over that He will come at a time when we least expect it, or at “a time you think not”?

Here's an example: We have traditionally thought that the end time 666 Beast System is the same system as the “Babylon” of Rev. 17-18. But more and more people are thinking they may be 2 different systems. If that ends up being the case, that changes everything we've always thought. If end-time Babylon is the current economic/religious system which must first be destroyed, and we see world economies grind to a halt – and then if we see the dynamic world leader lead the world out of this disaster, he will be hailed as a hero, as a savior, even as a god.

We know the end-time Babylon will be destroyed suddenly and dramatically (Rev. 18). Some see that end-time Babylon as New York City. Others think it is Rome. Watch. Be alert to all possibilities.

So perhaps, as I see it, we could possibly see economic disaster as we've never seen before. Many will think “this is the end”. But even Jesus warned: when you see these things, it's only the beginning of sorrows. Then there appears to be a worldwide rebound just before the Great Tribulation, as the world is depicted by Yahshua as being prosperous, in a building boom, people marrying and giving in marriage – and then comes sudden destruction, massive persecution and death to many of God's people.

Whether the sudden destruction comes in 3-4 years, 7-10 years, 20, 30, 40 or more years -- I don't know – and that's a large part of this message: We don't know the exact timing of all this (Mark 13:13). Think about this: even though Jesus inspired the prophecies of Daniel and the other prophets – even He said He couldn't figure out the exact day or hour at that time, even though He inspired it! How is it we feel we can do a better job of figuring it out?

So the point is not to have to figure it out, but to be aware, alert and ready to quickly respond no matter how end time events come about.

But my point is: world events are making the world ripe for the appearance of the end time Beast power and the end time false prophet.

TRACK 4—So WHAT SHOULD BE THE *MOST* IMPORTANT FOCUS IN OUR LIVES?

Many Christians want to hear more and more prophecy. A sermon on prophecy always attracts more interest than a sermon on knowing God or living a life of love. But brethren, we've got to get this: Yahweh tells us what is most important to Him. So even as we discuss prophecy, which is important, I must remind all of us what is *most* important – according to Yahweh himself. Listen to what He says:

1 Corinthians 13:2

And though I have *the gift of* prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.

Yahweh tells us our focus should be on a life evidenced by love. Even if you or I could perfectly figure out all mysteries and prophecies, if our life is not evidenced by love, we're nothing. Nothing.

Peter echoes the same thought.

1 Peter 4:7-8

7 But the end of all things is at hand; therefore be serious and watchful in your prayers. **8** And **above all things** have fervent love for one another, for *"love will cover a multitude of sins."**

"Above all things" we are to have fervent love. Peter says this is more important than anything else, even in context of being at "the end of all things". We must have fervent love for God and for people – or we aren't His disciples (John 13:33-34). God's people love everyone – even our enemies, and we prove that love by actions depicting love. We see other brethren as parts of the body of Christ and treat each other the way we would treat Yahshua Himself.

So the big three, according to 1 Corinthians 13:13 are faith, hope and love, but "the greatest of these is love". The greatest. Prophecy is important, but it doesn't even make it to the top three.

So as much as we love prophecy, let's spend the bulk of our time focusing on studies and thoughts of loving God and man – and living that life.

Beyond love, but related to it, we are to make our life goal and aim to be able to say we know God, and more importantly, that He would say He knows us. Many claim to know Him. Paul describes it as an ongoing quest – "I make it my aim to know Him..." (Philippians 3:9), since "knowing" somebody is an active quest. I can know you today, but if I don't keep our relationship current and active, I may not know you very well a year or 10 years from now. Same with our relationship with God.

I've given recent sermons about how "knowing Him" is our greatest quest. Jeremiah says the same thing in Jer. 9:23-24. Knowing God ties in to loving Him and loving fellow man because scripture is clear that we can't claim to love God and not love our neighbor.

So I say to all you prophecy buffs: be sure you're putting even more time, more study, more focus on loving God and loving people – and knowing God, than you ever are on trying to understand time lines and prophecy, or we can still end up being "nothing" in God's eyes even if you happened to get all prophecy exactly right (1 Cor. 13:2).

Once those qualities are in place, we should take comfort in that God will take care of His children when the Great Tribulation begins – whether in a *place of safety*, or by giving us the strength to get through it. Daniel 12:1 says those "written in the book of life" will be delivered. If Yahweh allows us to have to go through martyrdom and persecution, we also know He will be with us every step of the way, giving us the strength to witness powerfully for Him and His name even in the face of death - - as in the case of Stephen's martyrdom.

I hope and pray there will be a literal place of safety, but I am not making a god out of the Place of Safety, or my source of comfort. True, Scripture mentions the Woman being given wings of an eagle (symbolism) so she can fly to her place in the wilderness" (Rev. 12:13-14), being spared from the hour of trial that comes upon the whole world (Rev. 3:10), and having to flee.

Whether or not there is an end-time place of safety, there will be brethren martyred in the end (Dan. 12:1-2; Matt 24:20-22). That time may soon be upon us – or not. We just don't know yet. The Bible says many of the saints, God's people, will be beheaded (Rev. 20:4), tortured and martyred, in the worst time of trial the world has ever seen.

Daniel prophesies that a coming power will “make war against the saints” (Daniel 7:21-22) and prevail against the saints *until* the Ancient of Days – God-- comes and delivers them and gives them the kingdoms of this world. You may wish to study on your own for now Daniel 7:15-27. It describes what we can anticipate to happen in the final years before the Christ’s return.

I personally would never say that those who are martyred or killed are necessarily “2nd rate” Christians. One of my friends feels if we are suitably tried and tested in this time, that we will be spared the Great Tribulation. I hope he’s right, but I’m not convinced. After all, even the two witnesses will be martyred. Jesus Himself was martyred. Paul, Peter, James, all the apostles but John were martyred, though they proved themselves over and over as being worthy of God’s calling and able to remain faithful even when beaten and tortured. So though it is appealing to believe we won’t have to go through the Great Tribulation, it would be more prudent to be spiritually and emotionally prepared to have to face anything God makes us face. My faith must be in Yahweh and in His Son – not in a physical place of safety.

Incidentally, the actual Greek in Luke 21:36 that is translated “counted worthy” in our KJV and NKJV, does not mean that in the Greek. Check it out yourself in Strong’s, or Briggs or Vine’s. The word in Greek means “to prevail”. It’s the same word used in Matthew 16:18 where “the gates of hell will not *prevail* against it”. Other translations correctly translate Luke 21:36 as “pray that you can come through, or get through” this time of trouble.

One last thought: some time ago, on my website, I gave a sermon about *being* ready, not getting ready (Matthew 24:44). Yahshua says “therefore be ready..” After all, our own personal end time could come as soon as our next heart beat. So be ready to face your Maker no matter when your end time comes. If we think we can always have time to get ready, that’s the mistake of the 5 virgins whose oil was running out (Matt 25). For more details on being ready, vs. getting ready – check out the sermon on www.LightontheRock.com

So what is most important is to love God and Man and to know Him and be known of Him, and to be “in Him”. Everything else comes lower in priority.

Track 5 – DO WE NEED TO KNOW THE EXACT TIME LINES OF PROPHECY?

In terms of understanding the times, I think we must cover another point: can we figure out all the exact time lines of end time events and news of the world? Must we figure out exact details, somehow, in order to be saved from these troubling times?

First of all, too much is happening behind the scenes. The news we hear is what the media and government want us to hear, or allow us to hear. Much of the most important news is either not widely known or not being disseminated at all. So we just aren’t getting all the news we should be getting anyway. I try to listen to foreign broadcasts or even check on-line for news of the world, but still – it’s what the media and government want us to hear and know.

So there has to be something better, and there is.

God did not require His servants to have everything all figured out in order for them to be saved from what was about to happen. Instead, Yahweh made a point to go to His servants and reveal to them what He wanted them to know, and when they had to know it. God does not change. He will do the same for us in the end time. There is a key in Amos 3:7.

Amos 3:7

“Surely the Eternal does nothing, unless He reveals His secret to His servants, the prophets”.

Here's an example: was Lot delivered from the destruction of Sodom, where he lived, because he had spent countless hours trying to figure out prophecy?

No. He was delivered because he was a righteous man, and God would not destroy the righteous with the ungodly, even as God had previously made the commitment to Abraham to spare the righteous. (Gen 18:17 – to end of the chapter). **2 Pet 2:7-9** says God knows how to deliver the righteous out of temptation – or the word can mean “adversity”. And He delivered righteous Lot.

God went to visit Abraham in Genesis 18:17, why? To tell Abraham what was about to happen. In verse 17—God asks, even states to Abraham: “Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do?”

The point is this: Abraham had no idea that just two days that all 4 of the largest “cities of the plain” would be gone! Gomorrah, Admah, and Zeboim, (Zoar was spared) suddenly just disappear as fire and brimstone rained down from the Almighty. But God took the initiative to go to Abraham. God sent His angels to Lot. There's a lesson there for us. God revealed things to them. And God reveals things to Daniel. God opened Jeremiah's eyes about the looming Babylonian captivity.

Even in the New Covenant times, God appears time and again in visions or dreams, to Peter, to Paul and others. Sometimes He sends His angels, as God did to Peter in the dungeon. He appeared in dreams and visions frequently. We are assured that God will do that again in the end time. We better be open to accept that we may soon have some of God's people once again having inspired dreams and visions from God. That's clear in Joel 2:28-29 and Num. 12:6. Some feel those days are over with and all we need now is God's word, but I think we will indeed see cases of divine revelation in the days to come. We can test those dreams and see if they fit God's word – but I think we'll see it all happening again soon.

My point is: Daniel, Abraham, Lot, Moses, and so many others did not have to figure it out. Instead, events they need to have revealed to them were revealed. In the very end time, I'm sure God will let us know what to do as well, and we'd better be ready to act on it when it is revealed. It will be revealed to the saints who are abiding in God. It apparently will not be revealed to those who spiritually sleep, who are not alert or abiding in Him or obeying Him.

We are told to watch, to be alert, on our guard. Let's look at that more closely now – this matter of watching, being on guard.

TRACK 6 – LESSONS FROM THE ALERT SENTRY; what it means “to WATCH

Yahshua said we should be able to see certain evidence of seasons – and the times we are in.

Matthew 16:1-3

Then the Pharisees and Sadducees came, and testing Him asked that He would show them a sign from heaven. ² He answered and said to them, "When it is evening you say, '*It will be fair weather, for the sky is red*'; ³ and in the morning, '*It will be foul weather today, for the sky is red and threatening*.' Hypocrites! *You know how to discern the face of the sky, but you cannot discern the signs of the times.*"

So astute people should see signs that indicate where we are, or what is about to happen – even if they don't have a specific day or hour. I think the signs are clearly here that we're certainly getting a lot closer. The coming of Messiah is as an unexpected thief, yet the saints shouldn't be caught totally unprepared! Let's read it:

1 Thessalonians 5:1-5, especially verse 4

"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 For when they say, "Peace and safety!" then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And *they* shall not escape.

⁴ *But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief.* ⁵ You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness"

So God's people won't know the day or hour – but we should be able to at least be ready to react when it all does start to suddenly wrap up.

When the terrorists attacked the Taj Mahal Hotel in Mumbai, one of the guests who escaped said he heard the shooting and bombings, and immediately reacted. When he ran down the stairs he saw shooting going on in the lobby, and people who seemed stunned, unable to move. He knew what to do, and quickly ran out the back kitchen doors, jumped into a cab and sped to the airport, to safety. Others who were not as alert, were killed.

There's a big lesson there. He didn't know it would happen, but when it began to happen, he – like the men of Issachar – understood the times and knew what he should do. That's the point. Being so close to God that we know His voice and react quickly to what He tells us. That's what a good watchman does.

Now, besides watching the signs of the times,– what else are we to watch?

Luke 21:34-35 (also Matthew 24)

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 unexpectedly.* ³⁵ For it will come as a snare (unexpectedly, suddenly – like a mouse trap!) on all those who dwell on the face of the whole earth."

I've already discussed the translation from the Greek of verse 36, especially the words "counted worthy". I hope to address this in more detail in a coming sermon.

Did you catch that? Take heed, watch, *yourselves*, v 34. Be praying you be counted worthy to escape all this. What do we watch? Ourselves. That we are abiding in Him so we will have confidence when He returns. (see 1 John 2:28-29). We have to follow Him. We have to humble ourselves totally and surrender ALL to Him. He owns us and we are His. And He is our God, our Master, our ruler, our Savior. Ephesians 6:10 says we now realize our strength is in Him, in the Lord, and the power of His might, so in the day of trouble we can stand. Our being ready is found in Him, in relationship with Him, not in reading newspapers and Wall Street Journals.

We are to be "on watch" – as a spiritual guard.

Mark 13:32-37

"But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. ³³ *Take heed, watch and pray*; for you do not know when the time is. ³⁴ *It is like a man going to a far country, who left his house and gave authority to his servants, and to each his work, and commanded the doorkeeper to watch. ³⁵ Watch therefore, for you do not know when the master of the house is coming — in the evening, at midnight, at the crowing of the rooster, or in the morning — ³⁶ lest, coming suddenly, he find you sleeping. ³⁷ And what I say to you, I say to all: Watch!"*

The Greek word for “watch” is *gregoreuo* – meaning to watch, keep vigilant, stay awake, and be alert. Here in Mark 13 it is put in context of praying. Paul puts it in a spiritual context in **1 Cor. 16:13-14** – tying it to being strong, standing fast in the faith and “let all you do, be done with love”. Once again, “watching” is tied to love and spiritual conditions.

Col. 4:2 also ties watching with being vigilant in prayer. Other scriptures tie it into *not* letting yourself go to sleep spiritually, or to let yourself be sidetracked, and to beware giving in to temptations. We’ve all done that. I certainly have. And we must repent deeply when we don’t stand watch spiritually.

Luke 12:35-40

³⁵ "Let your waist be girded and *your lamps burning*; [let the Holy SPIRIT burn bright in you!] ³⁶ and you yourselves be like men who wait for their master, when he will return from the wedding, *that when he comes and knocks they may open to him immediately*. [Remember Rev 3 – to the Laodecians – “I stand at the door and knock” – and they did not let Him in! Even LOT had to be urged to leave. The parallel story in Song of Solomon shows the bride waited so long to open the door that the Groom eventually took off]

³⁷ Blessed *are* those servants whom the master, when he comes, will find watching. Assuredly, I say to you that he will gird himself and have them sit down *to eat*, and will come and serve them. ³⁸ And if he should come in the second watch, or come in the third watch, [whether after midnight or even near dawn] and find *them* so, blessed are those servants. ³⁹ 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. ⁴⁰ *Therefore you also be ready*, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect."

We’re back to ‘being’ ready in verse 40. We’ll be ready if we are found “in Him” and living a life demonstrative of God’s presence in our lives, a life of love.

And I repeat: if we focus so much on events, and news, and prophecy – and omit what the Bible calls the more important matters like love, we are nothing. “Though I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries, if I have not love, I am nothing.” (1 Cor. 13:2).

Several things from the gospel warnings: who stands watch at 2 am or 4 am or whatever time middle of the night? No one – unless you’re a guard at a military post and assigned to! Perhaps that’s sort of the point here! We’re God’s soldiers, and we are supposed to be on guard. Apparently, spiritually speaking, we are supposed to be *always* on guard, always vigilant to our spiritual condition. ***There are so many distractions*** that can take us off our watch, off our vigilance. We can get concerned with “cares of this life”. We can be distracted by the passing pleasures and temptations of sin, especially sins pertaining to drunkenness and sex. Those things can take us off our watch.

Many of us have fallen prey to these temptations to varying degrees, even me. So we must beware "the sin that so easily besets us", as Paul put it (Heb 12:2); sins that can take us off our watch. What have enemy forces done for thousands of years? They distract the sentries. How? Often by sending in beautiful women to tempt and arouse them, to get them no longer be using their heads!

Do you think for a moment that Satan won't try the same thing on us? And there's plenty of distraction going on out there. My brother calls Satan's tactics the "weapons of Mass Distraction". We're distracted by the economy. Sports. Alcohol. Money and pursuing money. Health, or the lack thereof. Worries about everything. We're distracted by being too busy...busy, busy, busy. We get too busy to have time left to focus on the things of God, the things that matter. Even you in ministry: beware that you're so busy working for the Master that we forget to spend time with the Master.

We're distracted by movies about sinners sinning, which seem to amuse God's children. Then there's sex galore. And it's so easy to let our guard down, to be distracted, and not watching ourselves and our surroundings.

Revelation 16:15

"Behold, I am coming as a thief. Blessed is he who *watches*, and keeps his garments, lest he walk naked and they see his shame."

"Keeps his garments" have to do with being righteous, so we're not found naked or in filthy garments. It's not easy to stay clothed with the righteousness of God. I've often taken off God's garments of righteousness He's given me and then had to repent deeply of doing that.

A good guard stays alert, watching all directions, up and down – for he knows he doesn't know how things can actually turn out. But by watching all directions, making no assumptions, he'll be able to respond quickly and effectively no matter what happens, as long as he stays alert, doesn't fall asleep, and remembers the importance of watching and assuming nothing. He's expecting the unexpected.

TRACK 7 – THINK OUTSIDE THE BOX; EXPECT THE UNEXPECTED

So a good sentry keeps watching all sides, all directions, and stays awake and in communication with his superiors. So besides all the things I've already said about watching the signs of the times, watching ourselves, and our relationship with God, a good sentry thinks "outside the box". Where could the attack come from? From where I least expect it. So he's looking around all the time and ready to respond no matter what happens, from whatever direction.

That's what I want to encourage us to do next: "think outside the box". By that I mean we shouldn't try to put end time scenarios into a neat little package – in a box – and then expect God to honor our view of things. That's all so backwards. But basically all these church studies that claim to teach exactly what will happen in what sequence, are people trying to put everything into a neat little box.

God is not beholden to the "box" we try to put Him in. God cannot be confined or put into a box. He is expert at surprising us with the things he does and how He chooses to do things.

Here are some examples of where it may be helpful to think outside the box:

- What if everything happens much, much *sooner* than we thought? Will we be ready?

- What if everything happens much, much *later* than we thought possible – 25-30-50 or more years? Will you remain faithful and zealous? Paul and Peter might have also said “impossible” in the 60’s AD if you had told them it might be a long time yet before Christ returns.
- I believe in a coming “place of safety”. Having said that: what if there is no place of safety in the way we have always thought, but it’s something totally different? Or not at all? What if there is not one place of safety? What if the place of safety (Rev 12, etc) is in several places – or what if it’s not even here on earth? I know, I know – it speaks of the “wilderness” and “her place” in Rev. 12. But just be willing to consider possibilities outside the box, so you’re not caught off guard. Be flexible. That’s what I’m advising. Don’t rigidly insist your or my understanding is the way things will work out. Be the good sentry watching in all directions.
- Some of you know somehow that King Jesus will be in the Place of Safety with us for 3-1/2 years before showing Himself to the rest of the world. I’m willing to consider all possibilities, without forgetting Jesus’ warnings to beware those who say the Christ is here, or there, or in the wilderness, for when He does come, everyone will know it (Matt 24:23-28,30).
- What if the end time Babylon is not the same thing as the end time Beast system? Think outside the box. It might all come about very differently than we have thought.
- What if New York *is* the end time Babylon, as my friend and some others believe? But don’t hold that belief so strongly that you make another box! What if it isn’t?
- What if the end time false prophet is not a pope or even a Christian – but a new age leader of a new worldwide religion acceptable to all faiths? But no, some of you have it all figured out as you’ve concluded “the whore” of Rev 18 has to be the Catholic Church. Think outside the box. Be open to other possibilities.
- A lot of our explanations of the book of Revelation are based on the chapter layouts, the chapter breaks. We claim to know which chapters are “story flow” and which ones are “insets”. But remember when Revelation was written, there were no chapters at all. What if we’re putting chapter pauses where there really are none? What if we’re calling a chapter “an inset” when it should be part of story flow? That changes everything then, doesn’t it. Expect the unexpected. Think outside the box.
- Some of you are aware of some upcoming very noteworthy series of eclipses in the years 2014 and 2015. Maybe they will mean something huge, or nothing at all. I suspect it’s worth knowing about and not being caught off guard. Yahweh does talk about heavenly signs.

Here’s the scoop: There will be a full lunar eclipse, when the moon will appear red, on the first day of unleavened bread and on the first day of the “Feast of Tabernacles both in 2014 and 2015. Now add to that, that in 2015, there will be at least a partial solar eclipse on the 1st of Nisan, the 1st day of God’s calendar as well as another solar eclipse on the “Feast of Trumpets” in 2015, the 1st day of God’s 7th Month, in late September 2015. The Feast of Trumpets is traditionally the “day of clouds and gloominess”. This is significant information – that may or may not mean anything, but it never happens again this century on those holydays. That’s clearly a day when “the sun will not give its light” (Matt 24:29).

- Millions more have lost trillions of dollars in their investments and retirement funds, in which they trusted for their retirement years.

- Will there be a real, physical 3rd Jerusalem Temple? Some of you are so sure there has to be a physical temple built in Jerusalem before the return of the Messiah. Surely Scripture says so, you feel. Others feel only sacrifices have to be offered – with no physical building necessary. Others are equally sure the “temple” refers to the spiritual temple-- the church. Be a good guard – watching all possibilities and knowing the arguments for each. It is noteworthy to be aware in Jerusalem, as we speak, they are preparing the priests’ garments, all the equipment needed, priestly ID and trainings have all taken place, from what I’ve heard and read. A group called The Temple Institute is actively campaigning to have the end-time temple. God willing, I will be in Jerusalem this coming Passover and hope to visit with those folks.
- Some of you think you’ve figured out who the 2 last witnesses are. I don’t think so!
- Most seem to think, and I have until a year or two ago, that the “10 kings” of Revelation 17:12, at the end time are kings of a European-based “Beast” system. A year or more ago, I gave some speculation that perhaps, upon more careful review, we need to see the 10 kings as ruling 10 regions of the world, and not just all based in Europe. I’m not the only one thinking this possibility. Many have that thought. They may be right. Or wrong. Just have your eyes open. Be watching. We don’t know yet. Be alert to all possibilities. Don’t lock yourself in to this idea either! One reason I believe that, is that the coming Beast system exercises its authority over all the nations, all peoples, all tribes, all languages (Rev. 13:3,8,14-15) – not just Europe.

So here on track 7 I’m saying be flexible. Be a good guard who is looking completely around, 360 degrees, not assuming everything is going to come from one direction. We post guards, we tell people to be on guard, because we *don’t* know all the details yet. But we have to be watching, and aware of sins and other distractions, so we’re not caught off guard!

CONCLUSION and wrap up

Let me wrap this up now. Here’s what we’ve covered so far.

- Learn from the Sons of Issachar. Men who understood the times and what Israel was supposed to do. Pray that we learn from that scripture to be the same kind of people today. Jesus did say that we should be able to know the time is close, just as those who watch the turning of the leaves in late summer/autumn... or those who watch the sky. And if we’re close to Yahweh, He will reveal to us what we need to know, when we need to know it.
- we don’t yet know when everything wraps up. Because we don’t know, we need to always BE ready, not focusing on getting ready. Most of all we need to watch our relationship with Him and with His Body - - the church. And really, we need to love everyone. Everyone.
- Love will trump everything. Though one may know all prophecy, if he/she is not characterized by love, it means nothing. This tells me to focus more time on studying how to be a man filled with the love of God in my marriage, in my child rearing, among my neighbors, with people at work, and everywhere I go.
- When the very end comes, it will be sudden. We won’t have time to go back home, to figure things out. We must be so close to God that we will recognize His voice or His directions, and we will know exactly what to do (Mumbai example- man who left immediately and went to airport. Smart. Others stayed and were shot).

- Be willing to quit thinking the way you always have. Think outside the box. Be a good guard. Expect the unexpected. Look at all possibilities, coming from any direction, or a multitude of directions. Think outside the box. The prophecy outlines we have been taught might be totally, or partially, wrong. Many other human predictions have failed. So be flexible when it comes to prophecy.
- I also covered how God made a point to go to, and to tell His servants about what was about to happen. Noah (Gen 6:13-14), Abraham (Gen 18:17), Lot (Gen 19), Moses, David, and so many others. God has not taken a leave of absence. We don't need to have everything all figured out ahead of time when it comes to prophecy – partly, because we're assured we WON'T have it all figured out and it will come at a time "you think not".
- Daniel, on the other hand, didn't just sit and wait. When he knew the prophesied 70 years of captivity were about up, he fasted and prayed. He repented, strove to get closer to God, he humbled himself, And as he fasted and prayed, Gabriel gave him a revelation (Daniel 9:20-23) of prophecies we still study today. Daniel 12:10 says the wise will understand. There are some good lessons there as we study Daniel.

SO – watch yourself, watch the signs, Love God, love people – and click on your spiritual seat belts. A rough ride is about to begin sooner or later. But be ready. Because when this ride takes off, there won't be a lot of warning.

That's all for now, brethren. God be with you and bless you. Philip Shields