

gested start dates, finish dates, and the events which took place at these times.

Conclusion

When considering world events as they unfold it is very easy to get things out of perspective and give more weight to particular events than is warranted. It is also easy to get discouraged when things do not develop as we anticipate, and we may even be tempted to discard correct interpretations in such circumstances. Some helpful words in this respect are found in Jeremiah 37. Some of the people were saying that the Chaldeans would leave the Land without attacking Jerusalem. In this context God says:

“Thus saith the LORD; Deceive not yourselves, saying, The Chaldeans shall surely depart from us: for they shall not depart. For though ye had smitten the whole army of the Chaldeans that fight against you, and there remained but wounded men among them, yet should they rise up every man in his tent, and burn this city with fire” (vv. 9,10).

Even if the Chaldeans were severely weakened, the prophecy would still be fulfilled, Jerusalem would still be attacked. The important thing was to remain faithful and to continue to believe the prophecies *whatever* might happen in the short term and however unlikely their fulfilment seemed. So, for example, Russia may have been weakened by the end of Communism, but this is not a reason for saying that it will not be able to invade Israel. Again, in Israel at the present time there is much violence, and the Israelis are building a wall to keep out suicide bombers, but this should not shake our faith in the prophecy that Israel will one day be “without walls, and having neither bars nor gates” (Ezek. 38:11) prior to the return of Christ.

We should therefore look at world events and take an interest in the things of which prophecy speaks. It is important that we have faith in God’s prophecies and remain faithful to correct interpretations, not allowing ourselves to be blown about by every shift and change in the affairs of the nations.

Watching when hope is deferred

Compiled from two articles by the late Brother Jim Wood*

THE DAY OF the watchman is today. Christ’s instruction is to be ready when he comes; but since “of that day and that hour knoweth no man” (Mk. 13:32), it means we have to be always ready—every hour of every day. His exhortation is, consequently, “Watch therefore” (Mt. 24:42), and he follows with the picture of the servant who says to himself, “My lord delayeth his coming” (v. 48), and who misuses his privileged position and squanders his lord’s time and money.

The outcome is: “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” (v. 50). Hence the constant need to be watching each day and hour, striving to ensure that the mind is not dulled by a surfeit of food and possessions, nor distracted by an abundance of pleasures and unprofitable activities.

So the day of the watchman is today. This is true in another sense too. This may be our last day; Jesus may come tonight, an accident may happen or ill-health strike so rapidly and unexpectedly that all plans for tomorrow will be

thwarted. If we believe his coming to be near, ought we not to live every day as though it were our last, making every effort to ensure that our determination and commitment have no opportunity to wane between now and his return? So, live today as though it were your last; the exhortation may not be new, but do we heed it daily? “Boast not thyself of to morrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth” (Prov. 27:1); but, “Son, go work to day in my vineyard” (Mt. 21:28).

“Hope deferred maketh the heart sick” (Prov. 13:12). The postponing of things longed for disappoints. The continuing non-fulfilment of things expected exasperates. The repeated non-attainment of one’s desires grieves. Disappointment, exasperation and grief change our outlook on life, affect our judgement and may lead us to take action which later we regret and which may have unfortunate consequences for others.

* “The day of the watchman (1)”, Feb. 1982, p. 33; “A proverb a day . . . (19)”, Sept. 1997, p. 337.

There was a sense of impatience in Eve, too. She was dissatisfied that there was a prohibition on her desire to partake of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The fruit was “pleasant” (Heb. *ta'avah*), and “she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her” (Gen. 3:6); and not one of us escapes the consequences of that action. None since then has had access to the tree of life, for God “placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life” (v. 24).

“But when the desire [*ta'avah*] cometh, it is a tree of life” (Prov. 13:12). Because Eve wished to satisfy her desire for the “pleasant” things, the opportunity to partake of the tree of life was removed. In God’s good time, however, to those prepared to wait, who overcome, and who endure to the end, God promises that He will “give to eat of the tree of life” (Rev. 2:7). In the garden the opportunity was retracted; in the restored “paradise of God” it is reinstated, for “Blessed are they that do His commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city” (22:14).

“The Lord is not slack concerning His promise” (2 Pet. 3:9). His plan will be realised. Though some may scoff, saying, “Where is the promise . . . ?” (v. 4), when the day appointed dawns, and not a moment before, the promises will be fulfilled. A necessity for the disciple is, then, patient continuance, active waiting, a state of expectant preparedness coupled with an endurance that is not soon weakened by delay, but strengthened by the knowledge that God has said: “Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will perform that good thing which I have promised” (Jer. 33:14).

Are we prepared to wait? Does hope deferred disappoint, exasperate and grieve us? Do we let the Lord’s delay change our outlook, affect our judgement? Do we find ourselves doing things which later we may regret? Let us remember the proverb and heed the appeal of James: “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” (Jas. 5:7). By God’s grace we will then have “right to the tree of life”.

Using prophecy

A step-by-step guide

Nigel Bernard

THE FOLLOWING guide uses Matthew 24:15,16 as an example:

“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 Judæa flee into the mountains”.

Step one—read the Word

It is essential that we read prophecy, that we listen to the words that are spoken. Those in A.D. 70 who had chosen not to find out about the words that the Lord Jesus had spoken would have been oblivious to the dangers to come. There is no short-cut. We have to make ourselves familiar with prophecy.

Step two—understand the prophecy

Those who listened to, and remembered, the words of Christ would have to decide on the

interpretation. What exactly is “the abomination of desolation” of which Daniel spoke? A key to understanding prophecy is to compare scripture with scripture.

An understanding of these words can be found by comparing them with Luke’s account of the Mount Olivet Prophecy: “And when ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh” (Lk. 21:20). The desolation clearly relates, at least in part, to armies besieging Jerusalem. Those who did not understand this would have been caught unawares. It was not good enough to say, “We can’t be dogmatic”; failure to understand would mean failure to survive.

Step Three—watch for signs of fulfilment

Having understood the prophecy, there was now a need to watch for signs that it was coming to pass. We must remain separate from the world