

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

Volume 25, Number 46

November 22, 2009



More Time

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 sware 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? (Daniel 12:4-8)

What does the angel intend to convey to Daniel by the command to "shut up...and seal the book"? Some commentaries indicate God told Daniel to shut up understanding or knowledge of the book. To be honest, this explanation seems nonsensical. Under the guiding hand of the Holy Spirit, Daniel wrote what appears as twelve chapters in our King James Old Testament, writing that covered his adult life. In this writing, we find various Babylonian leaders having dreams or other indications of judgment from God that they did not understand. Daniel repeatedly imparts knowledge to them—and to us—of God's message. Simply stated, for eleven chapters Daniel has given us knowledge. How can he now cover up and hide that knowledge? I suggest that a more logical explanation is that the angel directed Daniel to protect and to preserve the book. It is an important message from God to His people in future generations as much as it was to Daniel in his lifetime. Preserve it; do not let it become a private diary of an obscure captive in Babylon.

Daniel is to preserve the message of this book, with the various visions and interpretations and events. He was to preserve the lessons of the past and the import of the future. Interestingly, the angel informs Daniel that there will be many that will "run to and fro" seeking after and even gaining knowledge. But we gather that the knowledge gained is not the type of knowledge that has spiritual significance. We are reminded of what the apostle Paul said to Timothy about some who would be "ever learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth." In another place Paul spoke of those who had the wisdom of the world but did not know God, the creator of the world. He further instructed that the natural man doesn't and even cannot know things which can only be spiritually discerned by the leadership of the Holy Spirit. Thus this message of Daniel is not understood by

those whose focus is this world; but for those whose eye is single in seeking His righteousness He is found.

Our attention is then drawn to two angels, one on each side of the river, who have been hearing this message of futuristic events and of the end of all time. Although these angels constantly go in and out of the presence of God, and although they have existed for the entirety of history, yet they do not quite comprehend these events. They wonder at the message of what seems to be an undoing of this creation and a promise of a people entering into that sacred place called Heaven, where dwells the everlasting Father. It is a message which has interested them for a long time (see 1 Peter 1:12).

The angel asks about the timing of these things, particularly to the end of them. The answer gives us another focal point of intense interest, for the answer given is "...for a "...time, times, and an half." Following the contemporary dispensational view, many commentaries attempt to connect this point with their invented delayed week from the seventy week prophecy. Their interpretation claims that the "time" represents one year, "times" represents two years, and "an half" represents six months, making a total of three and a half years. The language seems incredibly vague for such a precise interpretation.

In the *New Bible Commentary*, edited by D. A. Carson, Sinclair Ferguson offers the most sensible explanation I have encountered for this term.

As before a time, times and half a time (cf. 7:25) expresses both a general and extended period of time and a sense that these periods are known to and limited by God. Just when

f. cf. compare

God's people have no defences left God himself will intervene (7).¹

We live in a time when contemporary Christians invest enormous time conjecturing about when the end of time and the Second Coming shall occur. In response to this fruitless investigation by people who cannot claim God's prophetic mantle on their words Paul affirms the same point.

But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you. For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape. But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief. Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober. (1 Thessalonians 5:1-6)

A thief doesn't trumpet the precise date of his burglary. He exploits the element of surprise. My wife and I experienced a burglary almost twenty years ago. We knew nothing of the event until after it had occurred. Based on this and similar passages, we may anticipate the season of the Second Coming, but we cannot know the precise time. Occasionally people use Paul's words, "...ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief..." to assert that studious Bible believers may know the exact time of the Second Coming. If this point were true, it would make Paul's closing admonition purposeless, "Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober." If you know the date of the Second Coming, you have no need to be watchful. We watch, anticipating the certainty of that glorious day, but we cannot predict its exact time.

In his excellent exposition of the Olivet Discourse Alfred Edersheim addresses this question of the uncertainty of the precise date of the Second Coming, including particularly its impact on faithful believers, in captivating terms.

It is at least a question, whether the Lord, while distinctly indicating these facts, had

¹ D. A. Carson, *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition*, 4th ed. (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, Ill., USA: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994).

intended to remove the doubt and uncertainty of their succession from the minds of His disciples. To have done so would have necessitated that which, in the opening sentence of the Second Division of this Discourse,^a He had expressly declared to lie beyond their ken. The 'when'—the day and the hour of His Coming—was to remain hidden from men and Angels.^b Nay, even the Son Himself—as they viewed Him and as He spake to them—knew it not.¹ It formed no part of His present Messianic Mission, nor subject for His Messianic Teaching. Had it done so, all the teaching that follows concerning the need of constant watchfulness, and the pressing duty of working for Christ in faith, hope, and love—with purity, self-denial, and endurance—would have been lost. The peculiar attitude of the Church: with loins girt for work, since the time was short, and the Lord might come at any moment; with her hands busy; her mind faithful; her bearing self-denying and devoted; her heart full of loving expectancy; her face upturned towards the Sun that was so soon to rise; and her ear straining to catch the first notes of heaven's song of triumph—all this would have been lost! What has sustained the Church during the night of sorrow these many centuries; what has nerved her with courage for the battle, with steadfastness to bear, with love to work, with patience and joy in disappointments—would all have been lost! The Church would not have been that of the New Testament, had she known the mystery of that day and hour, and not ever waited as for the immediate Coming of her Lord and Bridegroom.²

As Edersheim observes, it is the very absence of our knowledge of the precise date of the Second Coming that urges us to be constantly vigilant. We are to stand our watch faithfully, "occupying" our place of service and faith until He does come. If we were to know the precise date of His coming, we might be tempted to neglect our present active service, choosing slothfully to indulge our personal interests at the present,

^a St. Matt. 24:36 to end

^b St. Matt. 24:36

¹ The expression does not, of course, refer to Christ in His Divinity, but to the Christ, such as they saw Him, in His Messianic capacity and office

² Edersheim, A. (1896, 2003). *The life and times of Jesus the Messiah* (2:450-451). Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

because we know He will not come until that set and known future date. However, we live in the knowledge that all Biblical prophecy is been fulfilled, that all precursory events have come, that nothing prophetically stands between us and the Second Coming other than God's own choice as to the time of that event. We live every moment, breathe every breath, fully aware that the next nanosecond of time could be that epochal moment when all of creation will stop at the sound of the trumpet.

We should not overlook that finally in this last vision the pivotal question is not when these things shall be. It rather probes the outcome. "*O my Lord, what shall be the end of these things?*" I fear that the more people focus their attention on the "when" of the Second Coming the less they seek to know the "what" regarding that event. The "what" of that event shall be a God-centered, God-glorifying event, not a colossal and bloody battle. God shall no longer fight His enemies; then they shall all fall before Him in defeat. He shall stand before all humanity as the holy and righteous Judge. He shall welcome His beloved children, finally in their resurrected and glorified bodies, into glory, and He shall sentence the wicked to their place of deserved punishment.

Thus in quite different ways Daniel and Paul make the same point regarding the future culmination of God's eternal purpose.

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Worship service each Sunday 10:30 A. M.
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