

The resurrection was the Apostle Paul's goal. He knew it meant perfect knowledge and unbroken fellowship with God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Paul's defense to Felix regarding the accusation that he was "a mover of sedition among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes" was very interesting in view of our study of the resurrections.

Acts 24:13-16, 21

Neither can they prove the things whereof they now accuse me.

But this I confess unto thee, that after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets:

And have hope toward God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust.

And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and *toward men*....

Except it be for this one voice, that I cried standing among them, Touching the resurrection of the dead I am called in question by you this day.

The word "allow" in verse 15 should be translated "expect" or "look for." The hope for which Paul looked was the resurrection. He exercised himself to live a Christian life toward God and men in light of the resurrection.

There is a doctrine (which I embraced for a long time) that Jesus Christ's second coming would begin with a gathering of all the Christian believers followed by a period of time. Then would come the resurrection of the just which would be for all others who believed except Christians followed by a resurrection of the unjust.

However, our study of I Corinthians (Volume 1,

Issues 1-3) clearly shows the resurrection of the just is for all those who believe, including Christians. The Gathering Together is not a separate event, independent from the first resurrection, but rather one and the same.

The Old Testament is the New Testament concealed, while the New Testament is the Old Testament revealed. The great mystery, which was revealed in the seven Church Epistles, was spoken of in the Old Testament but not understood until God unveiled the mystery to Paul as he wrote in Romans through Thessalonians. Something is not a mystery because information is being hidden, but because the understanding of the information is hidden until revealed by God.

The Church Epistles refer constantly to the Old Testament to explain the information in the New Testament. Many of the truths revealed in the Epistles were prophesied in the Old Testament but veiled to the understanding of people. Although information is given about the resurrections, not one mention or any hint at all of a gathering of the Christian Church apart from the Resurrection is given. The information of a separate gathering is absent because there will be no separate gathering.

Jesus Christ taught many things which prepared the people for that which would come after his ascension. The truths pertaining to the mystery were clearly understood by him, and he often taught them (as is recorded in the Gospels). He frequently spoke prophetically concerning many things that were not applicable at the time he spoke, and would not become available until Pentecost (things like the new birth, worshiping God in spirit and in truth, speaking in tongues, the new commandment of love, Christ in, holy spirit, direct access to God, etc.). In one way or another he seemed to communicate all the truths written in the Church Epistles except the doctrine of the gathering of the Christians apart from the Resurrection! Why? Could it be he did not know it?

(He knew everything else!) Or was it excluded because it simply does not exist?

When asked about the end times, he clearly communicated all that will happen and never mentioned this gathering!

His disciples asked the specific question we all want to know about the end:

Matthew 24:3

And as he sat upon the mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately, saying, Tell us, when shall these things be? and what *shall be* the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?

We do not need to guess about these matters because Jesus Christ clearly communicated that which may be known.

Verses 4 and 5

And Jesus answered and said unto them, Take heed that no man deceive you.

For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many.

The word “Christ” in Greek is *christos* which literally means “anointed” and can be translated as such. Here, it would be more accurately translated “anointed” rather than Christ. Many have come since Jesus Christ ascended saying they are anointed and have deceived many.

Verses 6-8

And ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for all *these things* must come to pass, but the end is not yet.

For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places.

All these *are* the beginning of sorrows.

“Nation” is the Greek word *ethnos* here referring to ethnic groups or races. Ethnic groups will rise against ethnic groups and kingdom or nation against nation. Everything we have just read has been happening since Christ left, a time which is referred to as the beginning of sorrows. After these things occur, we are not told how long, we will move closer to the end. Notice the first word of verse 9:

Verses 9-13

Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name’s sake.

And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another.

And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many.

And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold.

But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved.

All these things have happened in the past also and are currently happening. The word “saved” is not always talking about eternal salvation. Sometimes, as here, it refers simply to being rescued from danger.

Verse 14

And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come.

Verse 14 should be compared to Romans 11:25.

Romans 11:25

For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in.

Nations and Gentiles are used interchangeably in the scriptures. When the gospel of the Kingdom shall be preached to all nations, the fulness of the Gentiles will be come in.

Matthew 24:15

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:)

The city of Jerusalem and the temple in Jerusalem are both referred to as the holy place. Daniel speaks about a week of years at the end times.

In the middle of the week, after three and a half years, the abomination of desolation will be set up. Many interpretations and theories have been written regarding the prophecy in Daniel and the abomination of desolation. Jesus stated “whoso readeth, let him understand.” The way to understanding Daniel is reading with faith for God to bring understanding.

All these things happen before the resurrections. Verse 16 again begins by describing time with the word “THEN.” Notice that the location in that which follows is Judea. This great tribulation is focused in Judea and is regarding Israel.

There is a difference between the great tribulation and God’s wrath. The great tribulation is organized by the devil against Israel. The wrath of God is organized by God against the devil and those who are his. We, as Christians, are promised that we have been saved from wrath.

Verses 16-30

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.

And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect’s sake those days shall be shortened.

Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here *is* Christ, or there; believe *it* not.

For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if *it were* possible, they shall deceive the very elect.

Behold, I have told you before.

Wherefore if they shall say unto you, Behold, he is in the desert; go not forth: behold, *he is* in the secret chambers; believe *it* not.

For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.

For wheresoever the carcase is, there will the eagles be gathered together.

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 heaven with power and great glory.

After all we have just read happens, then Christ will come back, and the just will be resurrected.

Verse 31

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.

The disciples had asked when the end would come. Jesus Christ responded with all we have just read. So these signs will be seen previous to the end, but he also told us no man knows the specific day and hour.

Verse 36

But of that day and hour knoweth no *man*, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only.

Christians are promised eternal life. We know we will be spared from wrath and will be gathered in the resurrection of the just. His return is not something we fear, but rejoice in, for then we will have uninterrupted, eternal, sinless, fellowship with God and our Lord Jesus Christ.

During the first century believers were apparently faced with people who were prophesying about the end times, just as we are today. Some were even saying Christ had already come back. II Thessalonians clears this up:

II Thessalonians 2:1-3

Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and *by* our gathering together unto him,

That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand.

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;

God again reveals to us a sequence of events so we do not get deceived. The Greek word *apostasia* occurs in Acts 21:21 translated “forsake” and here translated “a falling away.” The forsaking or falling away is like that which Jesus foretold in Matthew 24. In the end times many will fall away from God, forsaking His ways.

Matthew 24:11 and 12

And many false prophets shall rise, and shall

deceive many.

And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold.

First this falling away will come, and the son of perdition must be set up. This individual is associated with the abomination of desolation set up in Jerusalem. He will present himself to be Christ, as Jesus stated in Matthew. These things must come to pass first before the resurrection. We are so very blessed that God has chosen us to be a part of the resurrection of the just. We should stand a lifetime.

II Thessalonians 2:13-17

But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for

you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth:

Whereunto he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle.

Now our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God, even our Father, which hath loved us, and hath given *us* everlasting consolation and good hope through grace,

Comfort your hearts, and stablish you in every good word and work.

THE CHURCH TODAY (Acts 2:42-47) And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles. And all that believed were together, and had all things common; And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all *men*, as every man had need. And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.

The believers in the early church apparently spent much time fellowshiping in prayers. Jesus had taught his disciples many things about prayer. After his departure, with his ascension, they knew how to pray and how very essential prayer was to their walk with God.

The first thing recorded that Jesus taught about prayer was not to be a hypocrite. He emphasized prayer as act of worship or devotion to God which must be presented with a genuine, pure heart. Prayer was never to be used for the attention or adoration of man.

Matthew 6:5 and 6

And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites *are*: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.

But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.

Jesus also cautioned them not to use vain repetitions when they prayed. The unbelievers thought if they prayed the same prayer over and over their god would

respond. The main concern is not the repetition itself because we are encouraged elsewhere in God's Word to persist until we receive the answer. The problem is **vain** repetition which is much talking without concern or thought for what is being said. Repeating the same thing over and over again, useless speaking without distinct expression of purpose as contrasted with specific knowledgeable speech.

Verses 7 and 8

But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen *do*: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking.

Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him.

As a part of this teaching, Jesus Christ gives an example of prayer. Later in his ministry, his disciples asked him to teach them how to pray at which time he shared a similar prayer. These two examples are similar, but not identical. Jesus provided the essence and concepts we should be concerned with when we pray.

Certainly he never intended for this prayer to become vain repetition. Unfortunately this prayer has become

just that. Many repeat it often without even considering the words involved and their meaning. I suggest you study what is written in Matthew 6:9-15 and Luke 11:1-4 and pray similarly to this prayer with the same heart and believing our Lord intended.

The first few words bring to mind the relationship we have with God Almighty. He is our Father, and we are His children. Our God and Father is in heaven. His almighty power, heavenly viewpoint, absolute sovereignty, willingness to hear, and willingness to provide all come in focus with these few words.

Verse 9

...Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name.

“Our Father which art in heaven,” followed by, “hallowed be thy name,” reminds us He is Holy,

Holy, Holy, as Revelation 4:8 says. “Hallowed” is the same word most often translated as “holy.” The first record in Acts shows the believers had the same reverential, humble, awestruck attitude toward their heavenly Father when they prayed.

Acts 4:24

And when they heard that, they lifted up their voice to God with one accord, and said, Lord, thou *art* God, which hast made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is:

As we have seen here, acknowledging God is imperative when we pray. Our faith, trust, and love must be prevalent if we are to see our prayers answered. This information and more were part of the background understood by the believers in the first century church when they prayed. In our next issue we will examine more about prayer.