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|
Palestine

Jews

and

| Bible Prophecy

PALESTINE, JEWS,
AND
BIBLE PROPHECY

A GREAT SIGN OF THE
SECOND ADVENT
OF CHRIST

One of the most striking fulfillments of Bible prophecy the world has ever seen occurred on May 14, 1948. On that date the Jews proclaimed in the land of Palestine the independent nation of Israel. Since that time, the nation of Israel has been in the news almost continuously.

Events of great importance took place in Palestine in the month of June, 1967. There occurred one week of intensive war between Israel and the Arab nations of Egypt, Jordan, and Syria. Israel gained a great victory, and as a result, was able to capture and hold the land of the entire Sinai Peninsula, all of the part of Jordan which was on the west side of the Jordan River, and a small area of Syria. Thus Israel continues to be a powder-keg in the precarious world situations of today.

It is one of the smallest nations in the world, and yet in many ways it is one of the most important. Why is this so? Why was the establishment of modern Israel of great importance, and how did it fulfill Bible prophecy? What is yet in store for the Jews? How and why is this important to Christians?

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These are some of the questions we shall endeavor to answer in this study. If you are not a Christian, may these answers cause you to see the reality of the Word of God and of Jesus Christ and of your need of Him as your Saviour. If you are a Christian, may your faith be strengthened, may you study deeper into the mysteries of the Bible, and may you follow in all the ways of God's Word.

Who Are the Jews?

All over the world there are people called Jews. Some of them are rich, operating large stores and other enterprises, but many others are poor, living in sections of cities often called the "ghettos." They keep somewhat apart from other people, and do not often intermarry with those of other nationalities. They have special food stores where *kosher* foods are sold. They do not eat pork or other meats described in the Bible as "unclean." Most of their religious services are on Friday nights and Saturdays, which they observe as the Sabbath. Some of them are strict about these things, and others are not. In many places they are hated, distrusted, and generally looked down upon. Yet many of the greatest men were, or are, Jews, including Albert Einstein, Bernard Baruch, Felix Frankfurter, Louis Brandeis, and the musician, Mendelssohn.

There are, or have been until recently, Jews in every country on earth. For many centuries they had no homeland. Today Israel is their homeland, but only a small percentage of the Jews of the world live there. They continue to be a peculiar people

in the world. Who are they? Where did they originate?

From Adam to Jacob

For a starting point in our search for answers to the foregoing questions, we must go back to the beginning of the Bible. There we find the record of the creation of man, and we find his lineage traced. The first man was Adam, and his lineage is traced to Noah through his son, Seth, on down through Enoch, Methuselah, and others. Through Noah and his family, mankind was preserved during the great Flood. From Noah the lineage is traced through his son, Shem, on to Abraham. Abraham was called to leave his home in Babylon and go to Palestine. He was the first man to be called a Hebrew, a name applied to the Jews. The lineage continues through his son, Isaac, and through his son, Jacob. Jacob's name was changed by God to Israel.

From the twelve sons of Jacob, or Israel, the Hebrew, or Jewish, people have descended. It is true that the name *Jew* applies especially to those whose descent is traced through the son of Jacob, named Judah. However, we find that the Bible applies the name *Jew* to any descendant of Jacob, and so the Jews of today are considered to include all the blood descendants of Jacob, or Israel. (Compare Ezra 2:70 and 4:23.) Their lineage is traced in the Bible down to the mother of Christ, and thus, on the human side, Jesus Christ was born a Jew.

The Bible, itself, was all written by men

who were direct blood descendants of Jacob, or Israel, and who may therefore be termed Jews. The apostle Paul declared that "unto them [the Jews] were committed the oracles of God" (Romans 3:2). Christ Himself said, "...salvation is of the Jews" (or: "for the salvation of mankind is to come from our race"—as rendered in the New Testament in Modern English) (John 4:22).

By this it is to be understood that salvation was to come through Christ whose mother was a Hebrew of the Tribe of Judah.

Therefore, the Jews, their history, and the prophecies concerning them are of the greatest importance in the understanding of God's great plan of the ages leading to the establishment of the kingdom of Christ.

Highlights of Jewish History

Much of the older part of the Bible, commonly called the *Old Testament*, is a history of the twelve sons of Israel. The history of this people has been one of almost continuous trouble. During a time of drought in Palestine, the family of Israel migrated to Egypt. Favorable conditions caused them to remain, but later they were made slaves by the Egyptians. In the book of Exodus is a history of their deliverance from Egypt. The book of Joshua records their occupation of Palestine, an event which required a long period of warfare with the native inhabitants. Thereafter, as a nation, they were frequently conquered and oppressed by their neighbors as recorded in the book of Judges. They established a kingdom and prospered

during the reigns of Saul, David, and Solomon. Then the small kingdom split into two divisions called *Judah* and *Israel*, and within about a century both had been invaded and taken captive—one by Assyria and the other by Babylon. This captivity in Babylon lasted for seventy years as was foretold by the prophet Jeremiah. (See Jer. 25:11.)

A few thousand of the Jews returned from Babylon and re-established a Hebrew nation under the leadership of Ezra and Nehemiah. Alexander the Great took Palestine from the Persians, and later it became a part of the Roman Empire as it was at the time of Christ. In the year 70 A.D. the Jews rebelled against Roman rule, and the city of Jerusalem was destroyed by the Roman emperor, Titus. A last Jewish struggle against the Romans occurred in 135 A.D. As a result of this, Jerusalem was turned into a Roman colony, and Jews were not permitted to come into the vicinity.

The Jews, who remained, traveled in all directions away from Palestine, and thus Jewish communities were established in all parts of the world. But wherever they settled they met with hatred and persecution. This is known as *anti-Semitism*, and it continues in many places at the present time.

Terrible massacres of the Jews occurred in Russia and in Poland between 1880 and 1905, but the worst persecution of the Jews took place in Germany during the regime of Adolph Hitler—from 1933 to 1944. It is estimated that during this time over six million Jews were murdered in Germany and in the countries which came under German rule.

Among all the peoples of the world, none have suffered like the Jews. And yet they have retained their identity as a distinct people, although scattered in all the world and without a homeland for many centuries. Why have all these things happened to the Jews?

The scattering of the Jews to all countries of the world and their persecutions are definitely prophesied in the Bible. The first prophecy of this is found in Deuteronomy 28:25, and it was conditional. Israel was told that if they would be faithful to God they would be the most blessed people in the world, but if they turned away from God they could expect the curses described in verses 15-46. Among these curses was to be a dispersion as recorded in verse 25:

The Lord shall cause thee to be smitten before thine enemies: thou shalt go out one way against them and flee seven ways before them: and shalt be removed into all the kingdoms of the earth.

Furthermore, verse 37 describes what would then happen:

And thou shalt become an astonishment, a proverb, and a byword, among all nations whither the Lord shall lead thee.

Israel turned away from God, and the curses mentioned in this prophecy were poured out upon Israel exactly as promised. It is remarkable that a nation could be so scattered to every part of the earth and yet keep its identity. This has happened to no other people except the Jews. It happened to them because it was thus decreed by God.

The Times of Dispersal

The dispersion of the Jews took place in a number of phases during many centuries of time. The first great move from Palestine occurred, as previously noted, when Assyria conquered Israel and carried the people away as captives. This was in about 721 B.C. Judah was carried away captive to Babylon in about 607 B.C. The book of Ezra records the return of a part of the captive people. (Others returned with Nehemiah.)

New Testament Prophecy of Dispersal

Jesus prophesied of further scattering of the Jews. We find the record of this in Luke 21:23, 24:

...for there shall be great distress in the land, and wrath upon this people. And they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led away captive into all nations: and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles....

This is in connection with the prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem which, we have already noted, was carried out by the Romans in 70 A.D. Thus, in both the Old and New Testaments the dispersion of the Jews is foretold, and it met complete fulfillment.

The Two Times of Return

Bible prophecies speak of two different returns of the Jews to Palestine. The first was the prophecy of the return from Babylon. After 70 years of captivity, a relatively small

number of the Jews returned as Jeremiah had foretold.

All the prophets from Isaiah to Malachi lived during the time when God was pleading with the Jews to repent so that they would not go into captivity. But after they were taken, it was important that some should return and restore the temple service before the first advent of Christ. The Jews who returned from Babylon (then under the rule of Persia) built a temple and re-established the regular services. This temple was later rebuilt and enlarged by Herod just before the time of Christ.

The sacrifices were being offered at the time of Christ, and they continued to be until 70 A.D. However, the sacrifices should have ended at the crucifixion of Christ, as was shown by the rending of the great veil of the temple (Matthew 27:51)—had the Jews recognized the significance of the death of Christ. However, they did not, and continued sacrificial services until the temple was destroyed. The first return of the Jews fulfilled its purpose when the temple worship had been re-established prior to the time Christ made the great sacrifice on the cross.

The Last Dispersion and The Second Return

As Christ had foretold, Jerusalem was destroyed, and the Jews were banished from Palestine. Roman rule was replaced by Mohammedan rule, and both were hostile to the Jews. Inasmuch as the Jews were not permitted to return to Palestine, they were, in a

sense, captives in the lands where they lived. But Jesus had said that this captivity would last only until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled.

The time of Gentile rule of Jerusalem was to come to an end, and as has been pointed out, this was fulfilled in June of 1967 when the Jews took the old part of the city of Jerusalem from the Arabs.

The Zionist Movement

Cruel treatment of the Jews in many lands often caused them to fervently desire that they might again return to Palestine. But that land was under the rule of the Turks who were Mohammedans and, in general, unfriendly to the Jews. However, in 1870 the Turkish sultan permitted a few Jews to enter Palestine, and the first Jewish settlement of modern times was established, but they continued to suffer some hardships and persecutions.

In 1896, a Jewish leader in Europe, Theodore Herzl, wrote a pamphlet calling for a return of the Jews to Palestine with the ultimate aim of establishing an independent Jewish state. This was the beginning of the modern Zionist movement.

In 1897 the first world Zionist congress was held at Basel, Switzerland. Theodore Herzl then predicted that the Jewish state would be established in Palestine within fifty years, but the Sultan placed added restrictions on Jewish immigration to Palestine, and little

progress was made. So long as the Turks ruled Palestine, very few Jews could return, and those who did so were destined to suffer.

World War I

In the First World War, which began in 1914, Turkey, along with Germany, was one of the Central Powers, and was, therefore, an enemy of England. On December 11, 1917, British forces under the command of General Allenby captured Jerusalem, and Turkish rule of Palestine came to an end.

When the Treaty of Versailles was signed in 1919, England was given a mandate over Palestine by the League of Nations. This was a temporary rule by England until it could be determined what should be done with the country. During the war a great contribution to British science was made by the Jewish chemist, Dr. Chaim Weizmann. The British prime minister at that time was Lord Balfour, and he issued the famous declaration which stated that the British favored establishment of a Jewish national home in Palestine.

In accordance with this, the British, under their mandate, began to permit entry of Jews into Palestine. By 1929 Jews were returning at the rate of about 6,000 per year. In March of 1935 over 7,000 Jews entered Palestine. By the end of 1936 more than 370,000 Jews had returned. During the thirty years from 1918 to 1948, 600,000 Jews emigrated from other lands to Palestine.

Arab Opposition to Jewish Immigration

This great influx of Jews to Palestine was violently opposed by all of the Arab peoples of the Near East. The British were anxious to remain friends of both, and tried to please both sides. British oil interests were in Arab countries, and, in order to appease the Arabs, the number of Jews permitted to enter Palestine was put on a quota basis. This was made smaller and smaller until Jewish immigration was practically stopped.

Then came the rule of Hitler in Germany and World War II, during which time the greatest persecution of the Jews in all history was perpetrated. There was terrible persecution of the Jews in all European lands conquered by the Germans. The Jews made every possible effort to get to Palestine. The British intercepted many shiploads and took the fugitives to concentration camps. Many thousands entered Palestine as *illegal immigrants*.

World opinion demanded that Britain admit the Jews to Palestine, but the Arabs threatened to cut off the vital supplies of British oil. The United Nations attempted to solve the problem but failed. The situation got progressively worse until at last the British set a date when they would relinquish their rule over Palestine.

The Arab-Jewish War

The British withdrew on May 14, 1948, and on that date the Jews proclaimed the independent nation of Israel. The seven Arab nations declared war and marched their

armies against Israel. It looked as if the tiny, unprepared state of Israel would be crushed, but Bible prophecy was being fulfilled. Read Jeremiah 30:16-24 and note how wonderfully these events of history fulfilled the prophecy.

The Jews fought the Arabs with the goal of retaining the portion of Palestine which had been allotted to them by the United Nations, but by the help of God they were able to do better than that, for they defeated the Arab armies and increased the area of their land.

There are many stories of how the Arabs saw large armies when there were but few Jews, and how they often fled in terror without apparent reason. More than 300,000 Arabs fled from their homes in Palestine and became the nucleus of the great body of Arab refugees which continues to be a world problem.

The United Nations arranged for a cease-fire and truce, and continued its efforts to get the Arab nations to sign a peace treaty with Israel. But the Arab nations refused to recognize that Israel existed as a nation. A state of belligerency, or armed truce, existed until the month of June, 1967, when violent warfare again broke out. We have previously mentioned that Israel won a great victory and that they took over some territory which had been held by the Arab nations. As this is written (March 1968), there still has been no settlement, and the state of belligerency continues with frequent outbreaks of fighting. The Arab nations continue to refuse to negotiate directly with Israel.

The Establishment of the Independent Nation of Israel

The prophet Jeremiah declared that at the time when the Lord would deliver Israel from captivity "their nobles shall be of themselves, and their governor shall proceed from the midst of them..." (Jer. 30:21).

The independence of Israel was immediately recognized by the United States and other great nations of the world. The chemist, Dr. Chaim Weizmann, was elected President of Israel, and David Ben Gurion was chosen Prime Minister. A congress, called the *knesset*, was elected to make the laws. For the first time in twenty-six centuries Israel was a sovereign nation ruled by her own people.

The Greatest Return of the Jews

One of the greatest mass movements of people in the history of the world occurred during the period from 1948 to 1952. Without any restrictions, the Jews were free to go to Palestine. It was considered a wonderful movement when 600,000 Jews went to Palestine during the 30 years after World War I, but it was much more wonderful when another 600,000 Jews entered Palestine in the short time of three years after 1948.

When 60,000 per year were entering the land, the British declared that they could not be absorbed. But the time came when 200,000 per year were entering and being absorbed through the great efforts of the Jewish leaders. Vast tent cities were set up while hundreds of thousands of new homes were being built.

A Wonderful Fulfillment of Prophecy

This is one of the amazing things about the Zionist movement. Poor, ignorant Jews, like those of Yemen, were taken to Palestine in modern air liners. They did not realize that that which was happening to them was fulfilling Bible prophecy. But their tradition connected it somehow with the Messiah. They do not believe that Jesus was the Messiah, but we who believe all the Bible see how God has worked in a wonderful way to fulfill the prophecies relating to the return of the Jews. We can see that these things happened because the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ, is soon to come.

The return of the Jews to Palestine is one of the greatest modern fulfillments of Bible prophecy, ranking along with the fulfillment of Daniel 12:4, where it is foretold that in the last days knowledge would be increased. That this has happened can be seen in the great industrial revolution that has taken place during the last century.

The events in Palestine today are in many ways a key to the understanding of the continuing fulfillment of prophecy leading up to the battle of Armageddon and the second advent of Christ.

We have already noted that in His prophecy (recorded in Luke 21) Christ inferred that the captivity of the Jews in all nations would come to an end when "*the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled*." This apparently referred to the Gentile rule of Jerusalem. The harsh Turkish rule ended in 1917. British rule ended in 1948. The Arab kingdom of Jordan ruled the

Industry and agriculture expanded far beyond the wildest dreams of most of the people. A way was found to wash the salt from the land around the Dead Sea, and it now produces wonderful crops. Even the desolate desert of the Negev in the southern part of the land has been irrigated, and wherever the water flows, the desert becomes a green garden of beauty. Then oil was discovered, and the number of wells is steadily increasing.

The Jews entered Palestine from countries around the world. This also fulfills the prophecy uttered by Jeremiah: "*Behold, I will bring them from the north country, and gather them from the coasts of the earth...*" (Jer. 31:8). Most of them have come from Europe, but others came and are still coming from the many other nations to which their forefathers had been scattered. There are now more than 2,500,000 Jews living in Israel.

One of the thrilling events of the influx was the transfer of the entire Jewish population of the country of Yemen, in southern Arabia, to Palestine by air transport. These people had long maintained a tradition that some time the Messiah would come and take them to Palestine by a great bird or eagle. They believe the airlift was a fulfillment of the prophecy. And truly it was a part of the prophecy. And truly it was a part of the fulfillment of the prophecy which is a sign of the soon coming of Christ:

When the Lord shall build up Zion, he shall appear in his glory (Psalm 102: 16).

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old city until June of 1967. At that time Jerusalem at last became free of Gentile rule. The prophecy of Jesus was fulfilled as Gentile times came to an end.

Note that this prophecy concerning the ending of Gentile rule and the ending of the captivity of the Jewish people in all nations comes as a part of the prophecy of events which are signs of the second advent of Christ. Jesus said:

... when ye see these things come to pass, know ye that the kingdom of God is nigh at hand (Luke 21:31).

Several passages in the writings of the prophets distinctly refer to this latter-day return of the Jews to Palestine. Some of the most striking are found in Jeremiah 30 and 31. The return from Babylon, after a stay of 70 years, was foretold by Jeremiah (Jer 25:11 and 29:10). But in Jeremiah 30:3 we find a far different prophecy:

For, lo, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will bring again the captivity of my people Israel and Judah, saith the Lord; and I will cause them to return to the land that I gave to their fathers, and they shall possess it.

This speaks of a return when they would possess the land. They did not possess it after the return from Babylon. The land continued under foreign rule of the Persians, Greeks, and Romans. But now Israel is sovereign, and the Jews own and rule the land. Reading on through Jeremiah 30 we find a wonderful description of events which would precede the great return. The severe

persecution is described and called the "time of Jacob's trouble."

The persecution of the Jews in Europe previous to and during World War II surpassed anything ever before recorded in history. But the Jews survived as a people, and verse 16 was literally fulfilled as Nazi Germany and Hitler met their just fate. Verses 18 to 21 give a description of the joyous return during and after the time of trouble. Verse 21 shows that they would have a sovereign nation and would have regard for God.

Many of the Jews who have returned are not religious. However, many others are, and the Sabbath is observed in Israel. Even the trains and busses cease to operate on that day.

Verse 24 emphasizes the certainty of the fulfillment of the prophecy and declares that it would be considered, or seen, "in the latter days." Surely we have in these last days seen the fulfillment.

Those who have not had the opportunity to follow the news of these things as they have happened through the years should look up this very interesting history. A concise record will be found in the *World Book Encyclopedia*, 1954 edition, vol. 9, pages 4028-4031. Recent editions of other encyclopedias will also give the information. Compare these records with Jeremiah 30 and note the similarity.

Not All Jews to Return

The prophecies do not declare that all the Jews in the world will return to Palestine. This is clearly brought out in Jeremiah 31:

It has not been because of the righteousness of the Jews that they have been permitted to return. It has been to serve as a sign of the truth of God's Word and for His glory. The verses which follow verse 24 speak of wonderful things to happen to them after they return, and this part is still largely future.

In this connection it should be stated that an understanding and appreciation of this prophetic study should not cause one to favor the Jews above other peoples. One may feel a great dislike for the Jews as a people and may believe that they have been unfair to the Arabs, but whether one likes or dislikes the Jews does not change the Bible prophecies. We should not think that God would cause the Jews to return because of their refusal to accept Christ. The prophecies indicate that they would return in unbelief and continue to reject Jesus as the Messiah. However, when they see Him coming in the clouds of heaven and recognize the nail-pierced hands, a great many of them will acknowledge their mistake. They will be filled with sorrow. This is described in Zechariah 12:10, and their sorrow is described as "mourning"—as one "mourneth for his only son." Just how God will deal with them then is another subject for study.

Conditions Before Armageddon

One of the most striking prophecies of the return of the Jews is rather indirect and is found in Ezekiel 38. The main subject of this chapter is the events leading to the last great battle between two great combines of nations. This is generally understood to refer

6-8. In verse 6 the beginning of the Zionist movement is indicated. It started the day when Herzl and others began to call for the return. Verse 8 describes the return from the north country of Europe and from all coasts, or countries, of the earth in all conditions of health. The verse closes by saying, "A great company shall return thither." Surely more than one and one-half million are a "great company."

Verses 12 and 13 describe events which have happened in Palestine during the recent years of the return. God has blessed with good crops so that there has been wheat, an abundance of wine, and oil, and the people have rejoiced greatly. It is a common sight to see the Jews weep for joy and to bow down and kiss the soil of Israel as they arrive in Palestine.

The wonderful restoration of the land is foretold in Ezekiel 36:8-11. Notice especially verse 8:

But ye, O mountains of Israel, ye shall shoot forth your branches, and yield your fruit to my people of Israel; for they are at hand to come.

Reading on, one notices that verses 16 to 24 give a brief history of the actions of the Jews. In brief, they state that the Jews sinned when in their own land, and because of this God scattered them throughout all the earth. There they also profaned the name of the Lord by their ways of life. God then declared that for the sake of His holy name, and not for the goodness of Israel, He would gather them to their own land.

their land which I have given them, saith the Lord thy God.

What Will Happen Next?

As this is written, there is much speculation among Bible students as to just what we may now expect to happen in Israel. Some believe that the Jews will give up the lands they took from the Arab nations in exchange for a guarantee of peace. Others think that the Jews will continue to hold the old city of Jerusalem and will proceed to build a temple on the site of the temple of Solomon. The Mohammedan Mosque of Omar now stands there.

Some may even think that the Arab nations, with Russian arms which they now have, will eventually defeat and destroy the nation of Israel, but we do not believe so. Events are taking place so rapidly that by the time this is printed it may already be out of date. But we may be assured that the nation of Israel will not be destroyed. In fact, the Bible prophecies indicate the opposite.

"He Shall Appear in His Glory"

We are looking forward to the glorious second advent of Christ, and, from the many signs He gave of His return, we know that it is near. The Jews and events in Palestine are part of those signs which we are to watch. Jesus spoke of the glory of His coming thus:

When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory (Matthew 25:31).

Compare the thought of this verse with

to Armageddon. This conflict will center in Palestine, and the condition of Palestine at that time is described.

Verse 8 shows that the people in Israel then will be those who have been gathered out of the nations and who are then dwelling safely. This same thought is found in verse 11. Verse 12 shows that at that time the desolate places shall have been restored, and the people will have wealth. In fact, the armies of Gog come to take a spoil, indicating that the land and its possessions will be highly desirable. Verse 14 brings out the fact that the Jews must be dwelling in peace and safety before the great conflict will come. Apparently, a change must take place, for the Jews now live in constant danger from the Arabs.

Israel to Continue as a Nation

The history of Israel has been filled with trouble and oppression. Jerusalem has been captured and destroyed many times. The people once returned from Babylon, but were later driven out again. But never again will the people of Israel be driven out, as is clearly prophesied in Amos 9:14, 15:

And I will bring again the captivity of my people of Israel, and they shall build the waste cities, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and drink the wine thereof; they shall also make gardens, and eat the fruit of them. And I will plant them upon their land, and they shall no more be pulled up out of

Psalm 102:13-16. Here is a prophecy of the time when God would have mercy on Zion because the time to favor it has come. When this glory appears, all nations will fear, but before that glory comes, Zion will be built up. Notice the reading of verse 16:

When the Lord shall build up Zion, he shall appear in his glory.

God's work on earth is done by people, and in this case God is working through the Jewish people to build up Zion, including all the Holy Land or Palestine. It is not a coincidence that the Jews, who do not, as a nation, believe that the building up of Palestine has any connection with the coming of the Messiah, call their work the Zionist Movement. Surely God had a hand in their choice of the name, for the building up of Zion is just before His appearing in glory.

Let us not be in darkness as these wonderful things are taking place, but let us be ever watching and ready for the coming of our Lord. God has caused the Jews to return and rebuild the land of Palestine. He will continue to deal with them according to His Word and His pleasure.

The message to us is that "now is the day of salvation." Now is the time to see and believe the wonderful Word of God. Surely we live in the time when the coming of the Lord draweth nigh.

Let us watch and be ready!

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