

# YOU May NOT ESCAPE the Tribulation!

*Some who think they are going to a place of safety MAY NOT GET THERE AT ALL! Read WHY and whether this could include YOU!*

by L. Leroy Neff

**G**OD'S Church has heard many times the blunt warning of Jesus Christ: "Watch ye therefore, and pray always that ye may be accounted worthy to escape" (Luke 21:36).

We have been told many times to watch world conditions, to understand and know the prophecies of God, so that we will know when the time comes for God's people to escape. We have also been taught many, many times in sermons, in broadcasts, and in Church services that we are to pray consistently without intermission, not neglecting prayer for a single day so that we might be accounted worthy to escape. But some are neglecting their duty!

## Amazing Prophecy for Today

The escape of God's Church to safety is mentioned in Revelation 12. In this chapter is an amazing prophecy concerning the Church of God from ancient times until the return of Jesus Christ.

During our time Satan will be very angry with God's people, since he knows that he has but a short time left to deceive the nations. He is going to increase the pressure against God's people, and is going to do all he can to increase the persecution of deceived men against us! This persecution will become so severe that God will find it necessary to supernaturally protect His people, and help them escape to a place of safety, before the full force of tribulation and world trouble comes on the whole earth.

Notice the symbolism of this supernatural protection:

"And to the woman were given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness, into her place where she is nourished for a time, and times, and half a time, from the face of the serpent" (Rev. 12:14).

Not all of God's Church will be accounted worthy to go to safety. Verse 17 of this same chapter shows that after those in God's Church (who are doing their part in the Work of God) go to a place of safety there will be a "remnant" left. They keep God's Command-

ments and have the testimony of Jesus Christ, but are not accounted worthy to escape. This remnant will be subject to the full wrath of Satan the Devil. He makes war against them.

Why?

This same remnant is implied in the prophecies of Revelation, chapter three. In the second and third chapters we have the various eras of God's Church mentioned in detail. At the present time we are in the Philadelphia era of God's Church. This particular Church is promised that it will be kept from the hour of temptation which shall come upon all the world, to try those that dwell on earth. (Rev. 3:10.) But not all who are with us are spiritually of us—some are already in a Laodicean spirit! The last Church, the Church of Laodicea, does not have this promise. They receive the fury of Satan. Very likely few of these people will survive the terrible times of trouble and torture that will follow.

We should all make our calling and election sure. We do not have time to wait for a year, five years or ten years to get ready to be "spiritual." We cannot wait to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. The time to be preparing is now!

Of those who regularly attend God's Church many are weak and carnal-minded. They have no zeal. They do not have their hearts completely and totally in God's work and are not doing with their might the great work that God has commissioned all of us to do.

Moreover, only about half of the people listed on our records as baptized members in God's Church go to the Feast of Tabernacles. Of course, some aren't able to go because of sickness. Others are not able to go because their second tithe is not adequate to permit them to go each year. Some women who have unconverted mates are unable to go because their husbands will not permit them. God understands this.

But that does not excuse the others!

And of those who do attend God's Festivals there is always a "mixed multitude" who are like the Israelites of old

who complain, who will not obey God or respect the authority in His Church.

## Do You Have the Wrong Goal?

Many of you have the wrong goal—and don't know it! You are looking forward to escaping to safety as your goal in life. In effect, you have exactly the same belief and goal that many of the religious sects have today.

In some churches it is called the rapture. In others it is escaping hell by "going to heaven." The idea of going to a place of safety is exactly the same to some of you as it is to those who believe in the rapture theory.

The erroneous impression is that if you can be accounted worthy to escape to a place of safety, all of your troubles will be over. You have made the grade! Your entry into God's Kingdom is then completely assured. Your trials and troubles will be over.

Don't be so sure!

You need to understand more about the circumstances that are prophesied concerning the time when God's Church does go to safety!

This is a time of extreme trouble for the whole world. This is a time when every man's hand will be against his neighbor. It will be a time of crime, war, of pestilence, famine and of supernatural occurrences in the weather and in the sky.

It is a time that will become so terrible that nothing like it has ever come on earth before. We find an account of it in Matthew 24. The gospel of the Kingdom must first be preached to the world, and after that the climax of this age is going to come.

There will be the abomination of desolation that Daniel foretold. When this abomination is set up, those who may be in the land of Judea are commanded to flee to the mountains. It will be so pressing that Jesus said they should not even go into the house to take out clothes or other necessities.

It is a time so terrible and urgent that those women who are pregnant, or those who have suckling children will

have great difficulty (verse 19). It is a time when those in Judea will take a "flight"—flee for their lives. God's people will be as "a brand plucked from the fire," or as an animal snatched away from a trap. A time of extreme distress and trouble not only on the world but also on God's own people.

John describes this time of trouble in the Book of Revelation as a time when Satan in his anger is going to "cast out of his mouth water as a flood after the woman, that he might cause her to be carried away of the flood" (Rev. 12:15). Every kind of snare will be laid for God's people. But God intervenes supernaturally and helps the woman (verse 16).

### Paradise? — or Wilderness?

It is not a time of ease, *but a time of trouble*. You should begin to see now that for some, this will be the beginning of their problems, not the end. Some will find they have not grown spiritually enough to overcome the trials and troubles. Some will fall by the wayside. Some people, as the Jews in Europe under Hitler, will look at the paltry things they have accumulated in this life, property, bank accounts, and comfort. These must be left *completely and totally*. Others will see loved ones and relatives who are not in God's Church. Some of these people will find that when they count the cost, they will not "leave all" literally, and follow Jesus Christ. They will find that they cannot leave *relatives, friends, or material conveniences*.

*They will not be accounted worthy to escape*. It will be a time of serious decision for God's people and *many will not make the right decision!*

We know that the Faithful will escape to a place of safety, but where? Revelation 12:14 states that it will be in the "wilderness"—not a paradise! In the time of the end the ancient land of Edom, Moab and Ammon shall escape conquest by the revived Roman Empire (Dan. 11:41). Here is a small *desert* area which will be protected from this Fascist-Roman Catholic system. The place of escape in all likelihood will be within this desolate region.

The land anciently occupied by these nations is to the southeast of the Dead Sea!

In this region is a very famous natural stronghold called Petra.

Certain scriptures seem to indicate that this place *may be* the place of protection. The Greek word Petra is Sela in the Hebrew. This same word is often translated *Rock* in the Old Testament. Isaiah 42:1 states: "Let the inhabitants

of the rock (Sela or Petra) *sing*, let them shout from the top of the mountain. There are few inhabitants of Petra today, only a few bedouin Arabs live in the area. This text speaks of God's people shouting from the top of the mountains giving glory to God because of His might and strength. Certainly this must be referring to God's people rejoicing over the greatness and power of God who protects them in safety.

In Isaiah 16:1-5 we have another prophecy which may be veiled reference to the protection of God's people—"My fugitives (or outcasts)"—in this area.

Even the book of Psalms refers to this place. "Who will bring me to the fortified city? Who will lead me to Edom?" (Psalms 108:10). The fortified city referred to here may well be the *natural fortified* city of Petra which is located in the area of ancient Edom.

There are other scriptures which also indicate that Petra may be the place of protection. But God will make this evident and clear at the proper time and in the proper way.

Petra is such a rugged area that apparently only one airplane has ever landed there. It was a very tiny airplane and the pilot risked his life in performing such a precarious act. This was reported in one of the national magazines, and is a feat which is not expected to be duplicated. With this in mind, don't think that God is going to provide jet transportation direct from your home to Petra if you are accounted worthy to escape to safety.

Even if the prophecy of Revelation 12:14 would include transportation by air, it obviously would not take God's people all the way to Petra.

There is no airport in Petra. Nor any major airports nearby. The only way to fly there would be by huge airplanes which probably could not land any nearer than Jerusalem, Amman, Jordan or Cairo, Egypt! It is still many difficult miles to Petra! Remember the trials of the Exodus under Moses?

### Complainers Will be Unworthy to Escape

If you went three days into a hot, dusty desert without water would you complain? What if you *had* to fast for several days?

Would you complain and rebel against Jesus Christ?

Today, we complain about little things. Most of us have not had to go without food or water. We complain when the water doesn't taste right or we complain when we do not have a completely "balanced diet." We complain if we don't have fresh vegetables

or fresh fruit. We complain when we are not able to keep up to the same financial status of others who may be more prosperous. We complain about those whom God has set over us in authority, just as the ancient Israelites did.

We will never get to a place of safety with such wrong and rotten attitudes!

### What is Petra Like?

If Petra is to be the place of safety for those accounted worthy to escape, we ought to know a little bit about what it is like. There are library books available about Petra and also certain magazine articles. The February 1935 issue and the December 1955 issue of the National Geographic Magazine had articles about Petra. These are usually available in used book stores or second hand stores. If you still have a copy of the November 1956 issue of The PLAIN TRUTH, or can borrow one, you will find an article by Mrs. Herbert W. Armstrong about Petra.

From one point of view, Petra is a very beautiful place. It is a very colorful *desert*, and has many, many *caves* in the sides of the mountains. These caves were dug many centuries ago. The caves are *dirty*. It is very dry and *water is extremely limited*. The area consists almost wholly of *rock and wild figs and oleanders*.

There are *extremes of cold and heat*. On page 865 of the December 1955 issue of National Geographic we find the following quotation: "In our own time, the remoteness of Petra and its *intense summer heat and winter cold* have limited exploration."

Petra is no garden of Eden. It is no "cloud 19."

If this is the place where God's Church goes to safety, it will be one which will present many physical difficulties.

If God's people are permitted to go there they will be "cave dwellers" for three and one-half years!

We have become used to *soft living*. We have become used to warm, dry beds, hot and cold running water, central heating, and the many other multitudes of gadgets and appliances that are found in the modern American household. Petra is not like this.

From a physical point of view this is not going to be the wonderful place that many people have erroneously pictured. If you are looking forward to this event as a goal INSTEAD OF LOOKING FOR THE RETURN OF JESUS CHRIST, *you have the wrong goal*.

(Please continue on page 10)

become like the world!

It is your responsibility to properly use your liberty to visit one another. You ought to be spiritually mature enough to know what to say.

Finally, brethren, remember this: you can and should open your Bible and read verses about a subject that might come up in your conversation. How else are you going to know exactly what God says about any problem? If you are not sure about it, you have the Ambassador College Bible Correspondence Course, the *Good News* and *The Plain Truth* and the booklets to check up in. If you don't find the answer, write us.

And when you do visit one another

for a social occasion, keep your conversation guided by what God thinks. We don't mean use pseudo-spiritual sounding phrases. It is not the spiritual words you use that count, it is the spiritual *thoughts* you think and the spiritual deeds you do that count! Keep your mind on the goal—the Kingdom of God, and on your part in it—not on the little petty physical things around you. Your social visiting should never be from a selfish, getting motive, but always from a spiritual, giving motive—seeing how much you can inspire others by your presence and conversation. It is more blessed to give than to receive (Acts 20:36).

with *joyfulness* and *gladness* of heart. God has given us abundance in our nation such as the rest of the world has not had. Do we appreciate these things? *Some of us do not!* Instead of being appreciative, instead of being thankful and giving praise to God for this great abundance, we gripe and complain because others have more, or because we do not have what we would like to have, or what we think we should have.

This lack of appreciation for the wonderful spiritual and physical blessings of God will bar some from going to safety.

Our trials and temptations are small now. They are going to increase as Satan becomes more angry with God's Church. We must use the time well that God has given us to grow spiritually and to overcome the trials that lie ahead. The wonderful physical blessings that God has given us now are going to be taken away in a few years. *Let's appreciate these blessings now*, giving God thanks continually for supplying them for us. God wants us to enjoy these things to the full.

We must learn to pray daily, without intermission and with faith and fervency, believing God totally and completely. We must learn to overcome our own faults, to overcome Satan and the world about us.

But one final warning.

In I Cor. 10:1-13 we are told by the apostle Paul that all the things that happened to the children of Israel in ancient times were written down for *our instruction* and *learning* today. Are we learning these lessons? Or, are we right now making the *same mistakes* that they made. We must learn these lessons or else we will never escape the things that are coming on this earth.

Brethren, God is going to provide a way of escape for his people. It is going to be a hard, ratty and difficult way. *But, it will be a way of joy.*

Will you be among those who will be protected and *stand before Jesus Christ at His coming?*

## Question Box

(Continued from page 6)

If you have a sick neighbor, it might be *good* to visit him on the Sabbath. But you should not do his chores for him while on a Sabbath visit.

Offer your help if someone asks you only if it is a *genuine emergency*—in the case of an ox in a pit, a house on fire, or a similar situation. But do not *search* for people in trouble.

## YOU May NOT ESCAPE the Tribulation!

(Continued from page 8)

*But it is not all bad!* There will be difficult problems, but by God's spirit they can be overcome. From a spiritual point of view this is going to be the *climax* and *high point of the physical lives* of those to whom God offers this divine protection. This is going to be almost a continuous "Feast of Tabernacles."

In addition to supernaturally protecting and guiding his people to the place of safety, God is going to "nourish" (Rev. 12:14) his people. This nourishment certainly is both *spiritual* and *physical*.

This will be a time when God's people will have opportunity to be shut away from the world, to learn many new things about God's ways and His commands. It will be a time to grow spiritually. It will be a time of wonderful *fellowship* with God's own people.

### Lesson You Must Learn Now

But, there are important lessons that we must learn now. "And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting (high living), and drunkenness, and *cares* of this life and so that day come upon you unawares" (Luke 21:34). Many of you are over-concerned with the "high living" of our day. You have become overly concerned about the cares of this life, and have not put the Kingdom of God, and the work that God has given us to do, first in your life.

For such people the following warning is sounded: "For as a *snare* shall it come on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth" (verse 35).

"Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to *escape all these things* that shall come

to pass and *stand before the Son of man*" (Luke 21:36).

Notice these things. The command is to *watch* and *pray* always! Our prayers should be in accord with the instructions that Jesus Christ gave in Matt. 6:9-13. With these instructions Jesus Christ gives us many things to pray about in addition to praying that we might be protected from the trials and temptations that are ahead. If we pray faithfully and with our whole heart in this manner then we *shall* be accounted worthy to escape. *Some have had the erroneous idea that they should be praying only to escape.*

This scripture does not say to pray to *escape only* but that because we pray daily we can escape *all* of the things mentioned in this chapter and *stand before the Son of man*. That is the important point that many people have overlooked.

Many are looking forward to escape. They are not looking forward to the *return* of Jesus Christ.

For those who are not protected a remarkable and detailed prophecy is found in Deuteronomy 28, concerning the terrible siege and captivity that follows the escape of the Church. "Because you did not serve the Lord your God with *joyfulness and gladness of heart, by reason of the abundance of all things*, therefore you shall serve your enemies whom the Lord will send against you, in hunger and thirst, in nakedness and want of all things; and he will put a yoke of iron upon your neck until he has destroyed you" (Deut. 28:47, 48 RSV).

Here is one reason why some of God's called and chosen people *will not go to safety*. They are not serving God