

## The Handwriting Is on The Wall (2003)

### The Night Is Far Spent

John W. Ritenbaugh

Given 10-Oct-03; Tape #FT03-01

We are going to begin the sermon this evening in Romans 13:10-14.

Romans 13:10-14 Love works no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law. And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light. Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying. But put you on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof.

The phrase that caught my eye in regard to these verses is the one that says "And that, knowing the time, that now it is *high* time to awake out of sleep."

When Paul wrote in regard to sleep, he did not mean literally that we were asleep. That would be kind of ridiculous for people to sleep their entire life while they are converted. Sleep here has a figurative meaning. It means that a person needs to open his eyes and be sensitive to the way of Jesus Christ, the way of God, and be applying it in life.

I think we are learning, that as time goes on and the pressures mount even in our time here now, it becomes more and more difficult to keep ourselves focused on the Kingdom of God and the World Tomorrow. They were having the same problems in the First Century, and so Paul wrote "And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we [first] believed. The night is far spent."

We are living in the night, the time when the light of God has not come to all of mankind, but we have received it. We are living in the night. We can see things, but we cannot see them as clearly as we might see them a little bit later. But nonetheless, the night is still moving on toward the daytime when the Sun of Righteousness will appear in the sky, coming toward it.

I would like these verses to be the theme of this Feast, because each day it becomes ever clearer that we are experiencing the unraveling of our culture, and we need to be prepared for what is surely coming. It is only a matter of time until it arrives.

I think that there is no institution on earth on whom time impacts on one's overall perception of the daily use of life and time than the Church of God. This is because of the Bible's insistence that we use time wisely, because no one knows the time of Christ's return, nor of his or her death. This does not mean that we should live our lives in anxious fear, because fear can

paralyze as well as motivate. It does not mean that we are always to be in a gun-lap mentality either.

The time will indeed come. Anyone who has ever competed in running races knows that one has to be in shape for finishing the race. It does mean that every tick of the clock brings us that much closer to Christ's return and/or our death. These two taken together should spur us always to be in shape to be prepared for either one. We must run our course with wisdom, pacing with a steady persistent beat so that we neither lag behind nor burn ourselves out.

Being sufficiently motivated to make right use of time is a necessity for every Christian. This is one of the reasons why Matthew 24, Mark 13, and Luke 21 appear in the Bible. Jesus' Olivet Prophecy provides us with signs of His return and the approaching establishment of the Kingdom of God. Therein, if they are believed, lies the motivation to push on. This is why we are urged to watch and be alert to news events, and so we do. We believe that we are living in the end-time. But so did many people who came before us. They studied into the same prophecy and concluded that they too were living in the days just before Christ's return.

It is obvious from the New Testament that the apostles expected Christ's return in their time. And then, a thousand years later, as the new millennium approached as the date-year AD 1000, great anticipation arose again. When the Protestant Reformation got under way in the late 1500s, it began to surface again. Now history shows that approximately every 80 to 100 years, since the late 1850s, there is a revival of interest to some lesser or greater degree, especially in Evangelical Protestantism.

Seeing that these things are true, we believe that we are surely living in the last days before Christ's return. But are we? These things that we see as historical references ought to make us wonder: How can we be so sure since so many people for 1900 years before us have been *wrong* *wrong* in their perception of the time in which they were living in relation to the return of Jesus Christ?

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 your coming, and of the end of the world?

"What" and "when" is what they asked. They wanted to know "when" will be the time, and "what" will be the sign. Jesus gave a whole string of signs through there in Matthew 24.

Matthew 24:21-22 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.

The general answer for us in relation to what the apostles and all those others who misinterpreted the signs of the end, is that we have knowledge that nobody else before us had.

The idea, the notion, that Jesus is speaking of in verse 22 is of physical survival, not spiritual

salvation. He said, "Except those days should be shortened, there should no *flesh* be saved." He was talking about physical survival, not spiritual salvation. Also implicit in His remarks is that very much of the death and destruction that Jesus prophesied of is inflicted *by men upon men*, not by God upon men.

God could very easily kill all of mankind, but it was not until the 1950s that mankind possessed the means to destroy all human life right off the face of the earth through such things as the Hydrogen Bomb and chemical and biological weapons, which we call today "weapons of mass destruction." No other generation ever had the ability or the power to be able to do that.

What we see now in our time confirms what Jesus said in verse 22, that when this all begins to unfold and reaches its climax, no flesh would be saved alive physically unless God steps in and stops events *short* of what would occur if He did not stop it.

This is a major reason why I say that we have knowledge that they did not possess in their time, and we are living indeed in momentous times. Many of us have been living in these momentous times for a long, long time.

Also implicit in Jesus' remarks is that He is speaking of *worldwide* events. "Kingdoms against kingdoms" is specifically mentioned. "Earthquakes in different places," meaning all over the world. He is speaking of events that are worldwide. Implicit also within His remarks is that we would hear of these events *quickly*—perhaps almost as soon as they occurred. Now those before us did not really know what was going on anywhere except right in their immediate presence. Today we have communications means to know what is going on almost anywhere in the world almost immediately.

Thus the message here is that Christ's return is going to be a visible worldwide event that follows significant visible worldwide signs that are noted worldwide. This includes the Two Witnesses preaching worldwide, making the connections between the events (the signs) and Christ's return *plain* to all so that they have no excuse for not knowing what is going on. No other generation has ever been able to put those two things together in the same generation: (1) weapons of mass destruction and (2) *immediate* worldwide communication.

No other generation ever existed on earth with a destroying and killing power, and the satellite communication power of television, the Internet, the Worldwide Web until my generation began to be born, beginning between 1920 and 1925 and moving into early adulthood around 1950.

Matthew 24:32-33 Now learn a parable of the fig tree; When his branch is yet tender and puts forth leaves, you know that summer is nigh: So likewise you, when you shall see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors.

We are not there yet. We have not seen all these things, but we are seeing steps. We are seeing intensity and frequency of certain events that are taking place—events that Jesus listed amongst the signs that His return was approaching.

Matthew 24:34-35 Verily I say unto you, *This generation* shall not

pass till all these things be fulfilled. Heaven and earth shall pass away,  
but my words shall not pass away.

All of these things will occur within one generation of time. They have not all yet occurred, but that we are on track is beyond disproof.

Am I saying that my generation is *the* generation spoken of here? No, I am not. But at the same time we have no excuse for not knowing. We have no excuse for apathy, because it is very clear that we are right on the cusp of some *major* crisis. The clear evidence shows that no generation of mankind has *ever* been *closer!*

Time has been rather heavy on my mind of late because I have begun to read for the second time a book I feel is the most influential to my life of any secular book that I have ever read. Its title is *The Fourth Turning* by William Strauss and Neil Howe. The subject of this book is the steady ever recurring cycles of history, events, and attitudes of the British and American people. These men give absolutely no indication of believing in or even knowing of British-Israelism, and yet they show that these two nations are following *exactly* the same repeating and concurrent cycle.

Let me warn you, that should you choose to read this book, that it is not easy reading. It requires that one hold a great number of things in mind. They use a large number of unfamiliar words, and one especially has to have more than just a cursory interest in the background of British and American history.

Though the book does not mention them, I have concluded that the scope of the book includes Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and South Africa, because they are all offspring of Joseph. I think that it is possible, in the broader sense, that the book may actually include *all* of Israel as being on the same cycle of history as Britain and America.

The premise of the book for which they present plenty of evidence is that in each century (not necessarily a calendar century), or more accurately each 80 to 100 years, consists of four generations born 20 to 25 years apart. Each generation has a distinct personality, with characteristics different from the other three. The characteristics are shaped (would you believe) by childrearing—the childrearing practices of the previous generation, in combination with the events that all of the generations experience at the same time. Each generation, mainly because of its age, perceived and therefore reacted differently to the events all four generations were experiencing at the same time.

By way of illustration, a child of 5 (a member of the most recent generation born) will neither understand nor react in the same way to his nation's involvement in a war or depression as a young adult of 25 who may have to *respond* to that crisis by going to fight in that war as a soldier. They are one generation apart. The reactions are going to be different.

The same principle is true of the previous generation—the parents of the potential soldier. The potential soldier's parents would now be between age 45 and 50 as the war begins, and thus their perception of the war is different from their children's, who are the ones who will actually have to fight in the war. Their role in society is different, and their response and attitude

toward the war will be different, and it will shape them differently.

The same principle of perception of age, understanding, and response, and role in society holds true for their parents who are now in their 70s and 80s and are the grandparents of the potential soldier as the crisis of war falls on the nation. Each generation perceives, carries out, and is shaped differently by the same event.

Undoubtedly the generation in almost every case most radically shaped by the crisis is the generation of the soldiers who actually have to fight the war, facing great fear, frequent pain, and sometimes imminent death.

Here is a very important and interesting historical fact: For the past 600 years of British and American history—within each 80 to 100-year period—a major war would occur, throwing the nation into a physical crisis, alternated 40 to 50 years apart by a spiritual explosion within the nation. In other words, it is like one would take place in 1920, and the other would take place beginning in 1960 to 1970—40 to 50 years apart.

Now why has this book influenced me so greatly? First, it is because I saw in it Evelyn and myself, and many people that we know. I saw the lives, attitudes, character, perception, and the childrearing training that we received described so accurately...right on the button.

Second, and more importantly, I saw two men (the authors Strauss and Howe, who have nothing to do with the Bible except for seeing it as an accurate historical reference source, and who have nothing to do with the Church) who have taken history, current events, and public attitudes, predicting now a crisis of *major* proportion that is *time-wise* in harmony with the time of "*Jacob's trouble*." It is right in alignment with Jeremiah 30, with Daniel 12:1, and with Jesus' Olivet Prophecy.

Strauss and Howe make note of the fact that the Bible's writers, beginning with Israel's release from their bondage in Egypt, show that one generation in the Bible is 20 years, and that the Bible continues to show that it breaks things down very frequently into 20, 40, and 80-year periods of time. It is most clear in the book of Judges. But Strauss and Howe go to other places in the Bible and show that indeed the Bible shows Moses was about 40 years older than Joshua and Caleb. Their roles were completely different. The Bible shows they reacted differently from each other as well.

The authors give each 4 generations a catchy name that is also suitable to its dominate role in the 4 periods of 80 to 100 years that the cycle consists of. They are: (1) Artist, (2) Prophet, (3) Nomad, and (4) Hero. Each of these generations corresponds to a season of the natural cycle: spring, summer, fall, and winter.

The Artist generation is born in a time of *crisis* that corresponds to winter. It comes into young adulthood, beginning about age 20 or 21, as the spring season begins. During its period of ascendancy, the Artist generation gives birth to the *Prophet* generation that is born during that 20-year period.

The Prophet generation comes into young adulthood as the summer season begins. During the 20-year summer season it produces the following generation, which is the *Nomad* generation, which again is another 20 years. The Nomads in turn come into young adulthood as the fall

season begins, and in turn they give birth to the *Hero* generation that comes into young adulthood as the winter season begins.

The Hero generation gives birth then to the next *Artist* generation during the winter season, and the cycle begins again.

The spring season is a time of re-birth following a crisis, and a beginning of roughly 40 to 50 years of well-being, prosperity, and expansion within the nation. In the summer season the general well-being and the expansion hit their peak. It is also during this 20 to 25-year period that the time of the spiritual explosion takes place. Then in the fall 20 to 25-year period, it is one of gradual decline, and well-being giving rise to the winter, and a time of national physical crisis. Now how does this apply to our time?

This particular 80 to 100-year Artist generation was born beginning in the early years of the *Roaring Twenties*, and continuing through *The Depression* and into the beginning of the Second World War. The Artist generation is called in modern parlance in the newspapers and so forth of today, *The Silent Generation*. Some of you older folks can probably remember a book titled "*The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit*." He was an Artist.

The Artist generation incidentally is one that is fairly good. But the Artist began producing the Prophet generation in the early to mid-stages of the Second World War, and continued to do so until the very early 1960s. Our Prophet generation is known in modern parlance as *The Baby Boomers*.

The Baby Boomers are the ones who produced the spiritual and social upheaval and the impact of all the immorality of *The Consciousness Revolution* of the 1960s and 1970s as they rejected the values of their parents (the Artists), and especially of their grandparents (the Heroes—the ones who endured the Depression and fought the Second World War). That generation was now in the greatest position of power in the United States, in the government, and in industry. The Heroes were the captains of industry, and is the generation the Baby Boomer generation was rebelling against.

The Prophets (the Boomers) began producing the Nomads, called in modern parlance *The Thirteenth Generation*, *The Gen-Xers*, and also called *The Lost Generation*. They began to be produced in the mid 1960s.

The decay and unraveling of the American century is now noticeable to anybody and everybody with their eyes open and any sense of history at all. But a very interesting thing begins to occur during the Nomad early adult years. Again, if you are up on your news, it is beginning to hit the newspapers. As the Nomads come of age and mature, they begin to see clearly the tragic result of the way they were reared by their Boomer parents, and they begin to make positive changes with their childrearing practice, and thus begin shaping the character of the next Hero generation which will have to fight the wars during the crisis. They do not know it yet, but the cycles of history are showing that the Gen-Xers are producing the soldiers for the next war.

With the Nomad generation, the childrearing pendulum begins swinging the other way. According to Strauss and Howe, the next Hero generation has already begun and is approaching young adulthood. They are not adults yet, but they are in their teens and getting toward 20 and

21 years of age, as we are right on the cusp of the next turn of the wheel of time into a crisis (a winter period). The next Hero generation will begin entering young adulthood by 2005.

Strauss and Howe feel that the crisis is already being precipitated by the events you are reading about every day in your daily newspaper. They also feel that we will enter into the winter season very obviously, and the new cycle will begin in 2005. It does not mean that war is going to break out in 2005. It is the beginning period, and it is during that cycle that the crisis will occur. We can see it building. If you would read the book, and read your newspaper, you will see that the events these men predicted would occur are indeed occurring.

Please understand that the authors are not saying that each and every individual in each generation is moving in locked step. What they are saying is similar to the principle that God shows in Revelation 2 and 3 regarding the Church of God in His description of the Seven Churches. You have seven very different congregations.

The Ephesians have a dominant characteristic. Sardis has a dominant characteristic. He calls them "dead"! Philadelphia has a dominant characteristic. Laodicea has a dominant characteristic, does it not? You bet it does, but it does not mean that everybody in Laodicea is a Laodicean. It does not mean that everybody in the Philadelphia group is a Philadelphian. It does not mean that everybody in Thyratira is totally off base doctrinally. But there is a dominant characteristic for each and every one of the churches of God, and Christ calls *all* of those churches *His* church. That is what Strauss and Howe are saying here. They are not saying that everybody in the generation has exactly the same characteristics. They are saying that there is a number of dominant characteristics that the generation clearly showed and history clearly confirmed over a period of 600 years. Strauss and Howe wrote this book in 1995 through 1997. It was published in 1997.

Evelyn and I are clearly of the Artist generation. We are children of Heroes. Five of our children—Virginia, Carol, Susan, Diane, and Allison—are Baby Boomers. Two of them—Richard and Sharon—are Nomads.

I see absolutely no reason to believe, from observing what is happening in the world, that it should give any of us any reason for hope that mankind is going to be able to solve its problems by means of warfare. But that is what mankind has always used. Mankind has used warfare. Warfare then does not completely solve the problem (they think), and so 40 to 50 years later there is a spiritual outburst. It does not solve the problems either, because the spiritual outburst is never an outburst of truth. At best it is only partially a spiritual outburst of truth. Mankind has always used these things in the past, and they have never worked.

Turn with me to Jeremiah 6:1-17. I am just going to read through it. I am not going to give much in the way of illustration or explanation, because actually it becomes pretty clear. It is a *war warning* that is given to Judah, and especially to Benjamin even as the Babylonians were gearing up to invade Judah.

Jeremiah 6:1-10 O You children of Benjamin, gather yourselves to flee...[Are we not told to flee Babylon?] ...out of the midst of Jerusalem, and blow the trumpet in Tekoa, ...[That is, sound the

alarm.] ...and set up a sign of fire in Bethhaccerem: for evil appears out of the north [that was Babylon], and great destruction. I have likened the daughter of Zion to a comely and delicate woman. The shepherds with their flocks shall come unto her [for protection]; they shall pitch their tents against her round about; they shall feed every one in his place. [But God says] Prepare you war against her; arise, and let us go up at noon. Woe unto us! For the day goes away, for the shadows of the evening are stretched out. Arise, and let us go by night, and let us destroy her palaces. [This is what the Babylonians are saying.] For thus has the LORD of hosts said, Hew you down trees, and cast a mount against Jerusalem: [Siege engines and things of that nature.] This is the city to be visited: she is wholly oppression [or full of oppression] in the midst of her. As a fountain casts out her waters, so she casts out her wickedness: [Think of this in terms of America, brethren.] Violence and spoil is heard in her; before me continually is grief and wounds. Be you instructed, O Jerusalem, lest my soul depart from you; lest I make you desolate, a land not inhabited. Thus says the LORD of hosts. They shall thoroughly glean the remnant of Israel as a vine: turn back your hand as a grapegatherer into the baskets. [In other words, turn the leaves back so you pick every piece of fruit.] To whom shall I speak and give warning, that they may hear?

Has God warned Israel? Of course He has. There is more coming as well. A greater warning than was ever given in the past is going to be given in the future, and you can be aware as this occurs. You know that it is going to come. But God still asks a question:

Jeremiah 6:10 To whom shall I speak and give warning that they may hear? Behold, their ear is uncircumcised, and they cannot hearken; behold, the word of the LORD is unto them a reproach; they have no delight in it.

The Bible is being completely thrown out. They may as well burn them. You cannot do anything about the Ten Commandments anymore. You cannot display them. They come up with all of these justifications for getting rid of these things that seem to have some kind of a Christian religious overtone or undertone to it.

Jeremiah 6:11-17 Therefore I am full of the fury of the LORD; I am weary with holding in: I will pour it out upon the children abroad, and upon the assembly of young men together: for even the husband with the wife shall be taken, the aged with him that is full of days. And their houses shall be turned unto others, with their fields and wives together: for I will stretch out my hand upon the inhabitants of the land, says the LORD. [This is the crisis that we are just on the cusp of.]

For from the least of them even unto the greatest of them every one is given to covetousness; and from the prophet even unto the priest every one deals falsely. They have healed also the hurt of the daughter of my people slightly, saying, Peace, peace; when there is no peace. Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination? No, they were not at all ashamed, neither could they blush: therefore they shall fall among them that fall: at the time that I visit them they shall be cast down, says the LORD. Thus says the LORD, Stand you in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths where is the good way, and walk therein, and you shall find rest for your souls. But they said, We will not walk therein. Also I set watchmen over you, saying, Hearken to the sound of the trumpet. But they said, We will not hearken.

Many of you here heard the sound of that trumpet in the World Tomorrow radio program for 50 or 60 years. Anyway, you heard it. The trumpet was sounding in Israel as God warned the people of what was happening and what was going to happen, but they would not hear. So you see, the cycle is being repeated once again. The cycle continues relentlessly: war, followed by an uneasy and an illusionary peace; then a fervent spiritual awakening, turning the culture into turmoil, followed by a gradual unraveling, and back again to war as the solution is once again brought to the fore. But this time, brethren, the stage is set for an all-out destruction of mankind.

It is interesting that the underlying idea of the Hebrew root that is translated "peace" in verse 14 is "wholeness" or "completeness." It is very close to being synonymous with the Greek word translated "perfect" in the New Testament. It is also synonymous with the English word "complete" or "mature."

In verse 14, He is saying that the leaders are saying "It is done! We have fixed the problem." Each time a crisis or a spiritual awakening occurs, this is what they say. "We have got it fixed now." The leaders may have even been sincere, but they are still wrong, because the solution never worked.

Brethren, I submit to you that in this era of life we are living in, that the handwriting is on the wall. The cycle will never change until a solution that will change the real cause of mankind's dilemma is supplied. The root of the problem is mankind's heart, human nature, in combination with the earth being governed by the god of this world. These things cannot, will not be corrected according to God's purpose until the return of Jesus Christ. Whether or not mankind is even aware of this, let alone understand and believe, matters not. Nothing will change until Christ's return. Mankind does not know it, but Christ's return is mankind's hope, because this is what will fix the real problem. We are here to celebrate its coming in advance.

For a final scripture I want you to turn to Malachi 3: 14.

Malachi 3:14-18 You have said, It is vain to serve God: and what profit is it that we have kept his ordinance, and that we have walked mournfully [or humbly] before the LORD of hosts? And now [this is what it is like in Israel today] we call the proud happy; yes, they that work

wickedness are set up [admired and become celebrities]; yea, they that tempt God are even delivered. [That is, they go free.] Then they that feared the LORD spake often one to another: and the LORD hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the LORD, and that thought upon his name. And they shall be mine, says the LORD of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels, and I will spare them as a man spares his own son that serves him. Then shall you return and discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serves God and him that serves him not.

Malachi 4:1-2 For, behold, the day comes that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yes, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that comes shall burn them up, says the LORD of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch. But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings; and you shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall.

This series of verses begins with the world that we now live in, in which God and His truth is denigrated, and the lawbreakers seem to have everything going their way. But then it carries forward into the Tribulation, which is in reality the birth pangs of the Millennium. The Sun of Righteousness is a figurative representation of Christ, and it is He who has healing in His wings. It m