

ASSOCIATED BIBLE STUDENTS

“WEEPING MAY ENDURE FOR A NIGHT, BUT JOY COMETH IN THE MORNING.” PSALMS 30:5

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What are you expecting from Christmas?

...from Jesus' birth, death and resurrection...

Expectancy fills the air as we approach the Christmas season again...Perhaps there will be special days off from work to share with the family. Then there are all those gifts shared as tokens of love at this time of giving and sharing.

But for many it has been a hard year. Perhaps there is a lost loved one who will be painfully missed for the holidays. Perhaps the specter of world events of what will happen in 2006 renders the Christmas holiday a little less promising of all our expectations for “peace on earth, good will toward all.”

Expectations of Messiah

When the Wise Men followed the star to Bethlehem, they were expecting the birth of a King—the Biblical Messiah based on prophecy (Num. 24:17; Micah 5:2)....

“Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, Saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him...he demanded of them where Christ should be born. And they said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judaea: for thus it is written by the prophet, And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel. Then Herod, when he had privily called the wise men, inquired of them diligently what time the star appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem, and said,

Go and search diligently for the young child...When they had heard the king, they departed; and, lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy. And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh.” Matt. 2:1-6



Of course, the Babe Jesus was not presented as Messiah until he presented himself to John the Baptist for baptism at the age of 30 at the Jordan River. Right about that time people, in fact, were expecting the Messiah and wondering even if John was the Messiah.

“Now while the people were in a state of expectation and all were wondering in their hearts about John, as to whether he might be the Christ.” Luke 3:15 NAS

Actually, a very important prophecy in Daniel (9:24-27) told God's people to expect Messiah the Prince after 69 (symbolic) weeks—which would amount to 69 x 7 figurative “days,” or 483 literal years, from the time when the walls of Jerusalem began to be rebuilt.

“Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the Messiah the Prince shall be seven weeks [7], and [+] threescore and two weeks [62]: the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublous times.” Dan 9:25

No wonder they were expecting a Messiah to save them at that time!

God's People Expected Deliverance

But even though the Messiah Jesus was presented precisely on time, the people of Israel generally were not prepared to accept their Messiah. Why? They were expecting the wrong thing—at the right time! They expected Jesus Christ to deliver them from the yoke of the Romans. They expected a conquering king to establish the children of Israel as a “light to the gentiles” to bless the people of the world—as the prophets predicted (Isaiah 2:1-4; 49:6, etc.).

Instead—Jesus came to Jerusalem, lowly, riding upon a donkey's colt. Then instead of reigning as a king, he was killed in the most dishonorable and despicable way imaginable—crucified on a cross! Shortly thereafter, although a small number believed and taught Jesus was raised from the dead, the majority did not. Subsequently, the temple and the city of Jerusalem were both destroyed completely!

Fearful Expectation

This coming year is not terribly different from that far distant time. Our society worldwide faces unprecedented oppressive forces which would conquer and destroy all flesh. Surely, we have come to the time, “except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved” (Matt. 24:22).

Yes, people who do not have faith in God and His Plan are in reality expecting the worst. Unfortunately, many Christians, too, expect the worst for mankind.



“...Men fainting from fear and the expectation of the things which are coming upon the world; for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.” Luke 21:26-28 NAS

Again, people generally do not understand what to expect when Jesus Christ returns. They expect Jesus to return in his flesh on a literal cloud and that everybody would see him. In spite of popular expectations, Jesus cannot appear in his flesh for the world to see. “Yet a little while, and the world seeth me no more” (John 14:19). When Jesus died in the flesh, he gave it as a ransom price for man. He could not and will not take it back!

“My flesh, which I will give for the life of the world...” (John 6:514) “For even the Son of man came... to give his life [his humanity] a ransom for many.” Mark 10:45

Jesus returns in a time of trouble. “Cloud” or “clouds” represent a storm coming, a great storm of trouble. “Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him.” Rev 1:7

It was prophesied that the whole world would see the trouble accompanying Jesus' return, but they would not literally “see” him. In other words, they discern (Greek, *opsomai*, “mental...the discerning mind,” VINE'S EXPOSITORY DICTIONARY) him with their minds because of the trouble.

But many Christians too are filled with expectancy for the second coming of Jesus—with a “rapture” of the faithful. But their forecasted expectation for the majority “left behind” is pitifully dismal. In spite of efforts to portray God, our Heavenly Father, as merciful by suggesting that “millions” will go to heaven—that would leave billions to suffer eternal torment! ...Certainly our God is much wiser in His planning and more infinitely powerful in His carrying out of His Divine Plan!

But Luke’s Gospel account explains that when Christians see these ominous signs of trouble gathering, they should actually rejoice.

"But when these things begin to take place, straighten up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near." Luke 21:28 NAS

Why should they rejoice to see Jesus’ return with such foreboding trouble? They can rejoice because it means not only their deliverance—but the answer to all creation’s longing expectation.

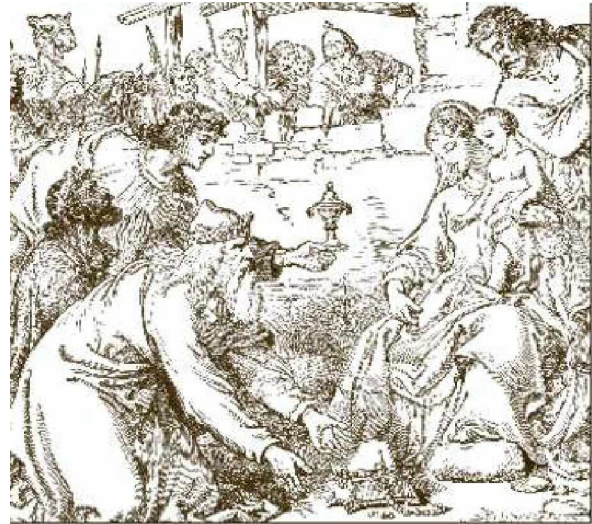
All Creation in Eager Expectation

All people are anxious to be rescued from the present travail of their lives—both personal and what they see happening around them in the world. They don’t know exactly what they are expecting—but they are somehow waiting for a “better day.” So what do they really expect?

“The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed.” Rom 8:19 NIV

They are waiting for not just the Son of God—but the sons (plural) of God! Although they do not know it, they are waiting for Jesus Christ with his faithful followers—God’s sons—who will bless them. God’s sons will be like Jesus (1 John 3:1) and with God on His throne (Revelation 3:21).

Heaven is God’s throne, but earth will be made His glorious footstool (Isa. 66:1; 60:13) That will be the time for which we pray, “Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is heaven” (Matt. 6:10). Earth will be restored to man as a



Paradise. Then there will be no more death, no more war, no more suffering in all the earth.

“He will swallow up death in victory; and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from off all faces; and the rebuke of his people shall he take away from off all the earth: for the LORD hath spoken it. And it shall be said in that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us: this is the LORD; we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation.” Isa 25:8-9

When this Kingdom of blessings arrives, all men will realize it is what they were waiting for and expecting all along. Then all people will have no fearful forebodings, but only joy. What the angels proclaimed when they announced Jesus’ birth will be a fulfilled reality. “Tidings of Great Joy to ALL people!”

“And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people” Luke 2:10

Families will be reunited! Indeed, and remarkably, the whole world will be one family! Then the true meaning of what we can hope from not only Jesus’ birth—but his death and resurrection—will be a reality to all the ends of the earth.

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