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Dear Brethren,

According to the Roman Civil Calendar, the year 2024 is ending and 2025 will soon begin. Down through the years, those who believe in the return of Christ have made many predictions as to *when* He would come. They have even predicted exact dates. But they have all failed. God the Father and Jesus Christ will continue to operate according to *their* timetable. And there are yet many prophetic events that must precede Jesus' return.

For many of us who have been in the Church of God for decades, we once believed that Jesus would have already returned by now—and we would be in the Kingdom of God, ruling with Him. But every attempt by men to calculate or set exact dates for the return of Christ has failed. A key reason is that such prognosticators have not understood God's actual timetable—for the major events to happen in prophecy are based on God's Sabbath and holy days. And we must not forget what Jesus Himself told us about His return: **"But concerning that day, and the hour, no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only"** (Matt. 24:36).

Indeed, forty days after His resurrection—after teaching the disciples much more about the Kingdom of God—as He was about to ascend into heaven, the disciples asked, ' "Lord, will You restore the kingdom to Israel at this time? 'And He said to them, '**It is not for you to know *the times or the seasons, which the Father has placed in His own authority***; but you yourselves shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you shall be My witnesses, both in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and unto *the ends of the earth* " '(Acts 1:6-8). This confirms that the Father has the sole authority in determining the exact time of Jesus' return. However, we are to *watch for specific prophetic events* that lead up to His second coming.

We Must Watch Events—Not Specific Dates: According to biblical prophecies of the end times, certain specific events must take place. This is why Jesus told us to watch *events*, not to set dates. There are *key events* that must transpire *before* the beginning of the Great Tribulation. However, many events we are witnessing today are leading up to the fulfillment of these key events. What follows are **five key prophetic events** that must occur.

First: The King of the North must be ruling in Europe. The fulfilling of this event is not yet on the horizon. Europe is in political and financial disarray. They are financially broke and have little military power. Religiously, the Catholic Church is at its lowest level of influence in modern history. Thus, it will take a number of years for the King of the North to appear.

Second: The King of the South must be in power in the Islamic countries of the Middle East. The turmoil and wars that are currently taking place across the Middle East will undoubtedly lay the foundation for the King of the South to come to power. But given the current condition of the Islamic nations, this will also take a number of years to develop. Ultimately, this king will become a threat to the King of the North, just as described by the prophet Daniel: "And at the time of the end,

the king of the south shall push at him. And the king of the north shall come against him like a whirlwind with chariots and with horsemen and with many ships; and he shall enter into the countries and shall overflow and sweep through. He shall also enter into the glorious land, and many countries shall be overthrown. But these shall escape out of his hand: Edom and Moab, and the chief of the children of Ammon. And he shall stretch out his hand also upon the countries. And the land of Egypt shall not escape. But he shall have power over the treasures of gold and silver, and over all the precious things of Egypt. And the Libyans and the Ethiopians shall be at his steps” (Dan. 11:40-43).

Third: Before these events can take place, the Jews must build the third Temple in Jerusalem, as shown in Matthew 24:15: “When you see the abomination of desolation ... standing in the holy place.” This shows that there must be a new Temple built before Jesus returns. The book of Revelation verifies this: “Then *the angel* gave me a measuring rod like a staff, saying, ‘**Arise and measure the temple of God**, and the altar, and those who worship in it. But leave out the court that *is* within the temple *area*, and do not measure it because it has been given *up* to the Gentiles; and they shall trample upon the holy city *for* forty-two months’ ” (Rev. 11:1-2). Finally, in II Thessalonians 2:1-10, the “man of sin”—who will be the King of the North—will sit in the new Temple claiming that he is “God.” This will be the “abomination that makes desolate.” Yet he will be destroyed by Christ at His return.

Fourth: The Two Witnesses must come on the scene. “And I will give *power* to My two witnesses, and they shall prophesy a thousand two hundred *and* sixty days, clothed in sackcloth. These are the two olive trees, and *the* two lampstands that stand before the God of the earth” (Rev. 11:3-4). The Two Witnesses will not come from any of the churches of God. One will be the governor of Judea and the other will be the high priest of the coming Temple (Zech. 3-4).

Fifth: A final Elijah is yet to come. About the same time the Two Witnesses appear, there will be a third and final Elijah to come on the scene. We find the biblical record of the *first Elijah* the prophet in I Kings 17-22 and II Kings 1-10.

The second Elijah was John the Baptist. When the angel Gabriel announced to Zacharias that his wife Elizabeth would bear him a son, he prophesied this about John the Baptist: “For he shall be great before the Lord. And he shall never drink wine or strong drink in any form, but he shall be filled with *the* Holy Spirit even from his mother’s womb. And many of the children of Israel shall he turn to *the* Lord their God. **And he shall go before Him in *the* spirit and power of Elijah, to turn *the* hearts of the fathers to *the* children, and *the* disobedient to *the* wisdom of *the* righteous, to make ready a people prepared for *the* Lord”** (Luke 1:15-17).

There are two prophecies concerning John the Baptist in the Old Testament. The first one is found in the book of Isaiah: “A voice is calling out in the wilderness, ‘Prepare the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God’ ” (Isa. 40:3). The second one is recorded in the book of Malachi: “ ‘**Behold, I will send My messenger, and he will prepare the way before Me.** And the Lord, Whom you seek, shall suddenly come to His temple, even the Messenger of the covenant, in Whom you delight. Behold, He comes,’ says the LORD of hosts” (Mal. 3:1).

After John the Baptist was circumcised and named John, his father Zacharias prophesied this about his son, “**And you, little child, shall be called *the* prophet of *the* Highest; for you shall go before *the* face of *the* Lord, to prepare His ways;** to give *the* knowledge of salvation to His people by *the* remission of their sins, through *the* deep inner compassions of our God; in which *the* dayspring from on high has visited us, to shine upon those who are sitting in darkness and in *the* shadow of death, to direct our feet into *the* way of peace” (Luke 1:76-79).

Although John the Baptist was described by the angel Gabriel as one coming in the spirit and power of Elijah, John the Baptist did not describe himself in that way. When the Jews asked John who he was, he did not declare himself to be Elijah. Notice his answer: “And this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, ‘Who are

you? 'Then he *freely* admitted, and did not deny, but declared, 'I am not the Christ. 'And they asked him, '**Then who are you? Are you Elijah?**' And he said, '**I am not.**' *Then they asked,* 'Are you the Prophet? 'And he answered, 'No. 'Therefore, they said to him, 'Who are you? What do you say about yourself so that we may give an answer to those who sent us? 'He said, '**I am a voice crying in the wilderness, "Make straight the way of the Lord,"**' as Isaiah the prophet said. 'Now those who had been sent belonged to *the sect* of the Pharisees" (John 1:19-24).

John did not identify himself with the prophecy of Malachi 3:1. Rather, he designated himself as "a voice crying in the wilderness"—from the prophet Isaiah. Why was this? It could only be that there is a *third* Elijah to come before the second coming of Jesus at the end of the age.

The *third* Elijah was prophesied of by Jesus Himself. After Peter, James, and John had seen the vision of Jesus' transfiguration, which included a vision of Moses and the first Elijah as well, Jesus announced to these three disciples that John the Baptist was *an* Elijah and that there was yet *another* Elijah to come. However, they apparently did not understand, because Jesus was speaking of an Elijah who "shall come" before His *second* coming—about which they knew nothing. Notice: "Now as they were descending from the mountain, Jesus commanded them, saying, '**Tell the vision to no one until the Son of man has risen from the dead.**' Then His disciples asked Him, saying, 'Why then do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?' And Jesus answered *and* said to them, '**Elijah shall indeed come first and restore all things** [a future Elijah—a third Elijah]. **But I tell you that Elijah has already come** [John the Baptist, the second Elijah], and they did not recognize him; but they did to him whatever they desired' " (Matt. 17:9-12).

It is important to realize that when Jesus told these things to the three disciples, John the Baptist—the second Elijah—had already been dead for some time. Before the vision of the transfiguration, it is recorded in Mark 6:17-28 that Herod the Tetrarch had beheaded John the Baptist. This means that Jesus was indeed declaring that a *third* Elijah was yet to come. Thus, Jesus was confirming the prophecy of a third Elijah as found in the book of Malachi—who is yet to appear before Jesus' second coming. " 'For behold, the day is coming, burning like a consuming oven; and all the proud, and every doer of wickedness, shall be stubble. And the day that comes shall burn them up,' says the LORD of hosts, 'and will leave them neither root nor branch. But unto you who fear My name, the Sun of Righteousness shall arise [this is the *sign* of the Son of Man that appears like a sun at the beginning of Jesus' second coming—Matt. 24:27-30], and healing will be in His wings. And you shall go out and grow up like calves of the stall. And you shall trample the wicked, for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet in the day that I *am* preparing,' says the LORD of hosts.

" 'Remember the law of Moses My servant, which I commanded to him in Horeb for all Israel, *with* the statutes and judgments. **Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD** [Jesus' *second* coming]. And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the sons, and the heart of the sons to their fathers, lest I come and strike the earth *with* utter destruction' " (Mal. 4:1-6).

This has to be the *third* Elijah—yet to come, as declared by Jesus: "Elijah shall come."

Decades ago a leading minister in a church of God was declared to be the third Elijah. But, he has been dead for 39 years and is thus too far removed from the return of Christ to have had any connection with the prophesied third Elijah. We still don't know who that man will be. But, most assuredly, he will not come from a church of God. It is more likely that he will be a descendant of the house of Aaron—of the priestly line, as was John the Baptist. He will likely minister to repenting Jews in Palestine, because of the work of the Two Witnesses (see Zech. 12:7-14).

While we cannot know the exact date, as Jesus said, we need to be watching for these prophesied events to unfold. This is why Jesus admonished us: "**Take heed, be watching and**

praying. For you do not know when the time is *coming*. *It is* like a man journeying to a far country, leaving his house and giving authority to his servants, and to each one his work, and commanding the doorkeeper to watch. **Be watching,** therefore, for you do not know when the master of the house is coming: at evening, or at midnight, or at *the cock's crowing*, or *in the morning*; **lest he come suddenly and find you sleeping. And what I say to you, I say to all: Watch!**" (Mark 13:33-37).

As recorded in the book of Luke, Jesus also told us to watch so that we are not caught up in the affairs of this world and preoccupied with the cares and troubles of this life: "Then He spoke a parable to them: 'Observe the fig tree, and all the trees. When they have already begun to bud, *and you look at them*, you yourselves know that summer is near. In the same way also, **when you see these things coming to pass, know that the kingdom of God is near.**

' "Truly I say to you, *there is* no way that this generation shall pass away until all *these things* have taken place. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but My words shall never pass away. **Watch yourselves, lest your hearts be preoccupied with high living and drinking and the cares of this life, and that day come upon you suddenly.** For as a snare it shall come upon all those who dwell on the face of the earth. **Watch therefore, and pray at all times** that you may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man' " (Luke 21:29-36).

Being Perfected in the Love of God: We know that God the Father and Jesus Christ love us. But we cannot take that for granted and focus on the physical things of this life and neglect our love for God. In fact, the best way to be watching our spiritual life and our relationship with God the Father and Jesus Christ is to *grow in the love of God*. This is the greatest thing we can do—and it's the greatest commandment of all: "*The first of all the commandments is*, 'Hear, O Israel. Our one God is *the Lord, the Lord. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.*' **This is the first commandment**" (Mark 12:29-30).

Remember, growing in the love of God is a process. It is based on our relationship and fellowship with God the Father and Jesus Christ through daily prayer and study. The apostle John wrote his first epistle when there was great turmoil in the churches and in the world, much like it is today. Thus, we can learn a great deal from John about how to live our lives in these times of trouble. We need to devote ourselves to prayer and study *and* focus on the love of God—God's love for us and our love for God. "**[I]f anyone is keeping His Word, truly in this one the love of God is being perfected...**" (I John 2:5).

John writes on how we are to *live* in the love of God and have His love perfected in us. "In this *way* the love of God was manifested toward us: that God sent His only begotten Son into the world, so that we might live through Him. **In this act is the love—not that we loved God; rather, that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.** Beloved, if God so loved us, we also are duty-bound to love one another. No one has seen God at any time. **Yet, if we love one another, God dwells in us, and His own love is perfected in us.**

"By this *standard* we know that we are dwelling in Him, and He *is dwelling* in us: because of His own Spirit, *which* He has given to us.... **And we have known and have believed the love that God has toward us. God is love, and the one who dwells in love is dwelling in God, and God in him. By this spiritual indwelling, the love of God is perfected within us,** so that we may have confidence in the day of judgment because even as He is, so also are we in this world. **There is no fear in the love of God; rather, perfect love casts out fear because fear has torment...**" (I John 4:9-13, 16-18).

The apostle Paul brings out that the love of God is combined with the faith and the grace of God. These are the spiritual gifts that empower us to develop godly character through the love of God. He writes, "Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through Whom **we also have access by faith into this grace in which we**

stand, and we ourselves boast in *the* hope of the glory of God. And not only *this*, but we also boast in tribulations, realizing that tribulation brings forth endurance, and endurance *brings forth* character, and character *brings forth* hope. **And the hope of God never makes us ashamed because the love of God has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, which has been given to us**” (Rom. 5:1-5).

Jude, the half-brother of Jesus, wrote that there were ungodly men subverting the grace of God. They were stealthily attempting to destroy the Church from the inside. He exhorted the brethren to stand strong for the faith and keep themselves in the love of God: “Beloved, when personally exerting all *my* diligence to write to you concerning the common salvation, I was compelled to write to you, **exhorting you to fervently fight for the faith**, which once for all *time* has been delivered to the saints. For certain men have stealthily crept in, those who long ago have been written about, condemning *them* to this judgment. *They are* ungodly men, who are perverting the grace of our God, *turning it* into licentiousness, and are personally denying the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ.... **Beloved, be building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, so that you keep yourselves in the love of God**” (Jude 3-4, 20-21).

It is evident that just as the early New Testament Church faced great spiritual challenges, we likewise face similar challenges. However, God has provided their encouraging epistles and writings for us so that we will have the spiritual strength to continue to grow in grace and knowledge and to develop a stronger love of God, day by day.

Brethren, once again we thank God for the blessing of serving you so that you can continue to love God and to grow in grace and knowledge. Thank you for reaching out to other brethren and to new people and directing them to *Church at Home*. Thank you for your prayers for us and all the brethren. We pray for you daily—for your healing, for your protection and comfort, for you to grow in the love and grace of God, for you to love one another, and for God to be with you in everything and bless you in every way. Especially in these difficult economic times, we thank you for your tithes and offerings—so that together we can continue to provide the Gospel to everyone who asks without cost. God’s method is perfect. We all give to others who, in turn, can reciprocate with their tithes and offerings. This is God’s way. Remember, every day we are to **stand in grace, walk in faith, believe in hope, and live in love**.

With love in Christ Jesus,

Fred R. Coulter

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PS: Our program of distributing Bibles and Interlinears continues to be a great success! We still have a lot of Bibles left—so feel free to request additional copies if you can place them into the hands of those who have a sincere desire to study the Scriptures. You can order copies individually or by the box—calfskin, 8 in a box; paperback, 8 in a box; vinyl, 6 in a box; and Interlinears, 4 in a box. Thank you and keep up the good work!