

Watchtower Study
Week September 2 – September 8, 2013
“Tell Us, When Will These Things Be?”
Watchtower July 15, 2013
ENDNOTES

ENDNOTES

par. 4 Paragraph 4: For more information, see [The Watchtower, February 15, 1994, pages 8-21](#) and [The Watchtower, May 1, 1999, pages 8-20](#).

*****w94 2/15 “What Will Be the Sign of Your Presence?”*** >>**

“What Will Be the Sign of Your Presence?”

“When will these things be, and what will be the sign of your presence and of the conclusion of the system of things?”—MATTHEW 24:3.

MOST people are interested in the future. Are you? In his book *Future Shock*, Professor Alvin Toffler noted “the sudden proliferation of organizations devoted to the study of the future.” He added: “We have seen the creation of future-oriented think tanks; the appearance of futurist journals in England, France, Italy, Germany and the United States; the spread of university courses in forecasting.” Toffler concluded: “Of course, no one can ‘know’ the future in any absolute sense.”

2 The book *Signs of Things to Come* says: “Palmistry, crystal gazing, astrology, card reading, I Ching are all techniques of more or less complexity to give us some idea of what our particular future might hold.” But instead of turning to human methods, we do better to look to a proven source—Jehovah.

3 The true God stated: “Just as I have figured, so it must occur; and just as I have counseled, that is what will come true.” (Isaiah 14:24, 27; 42:9) Yes, Jehovah has been able to counsel mankind about what will happen, often doing so through human spokesmen. One of these prophets wrote: “Jehovah will not do a thing unless he has revealed his confidential matter to his servants the prophets.”—Amos 3:7, 8; 2 Peter 1:20, 21.

4 Jesus Christ was God’s foremost prophet. (Hebrews 1:1, 2) Let us focus on one of Jesus’ key prophecies that foretells things occurring around us now. This prophecy also offers us insight into what will soon occur as the present wicked system ends and God replaces it with an earthly paradise.

5 Jesus proved that he was a prophet. (Mark 6:4; Luke 13:33; 24:19; John 4:19; 6:14; 9:17) Thus, it is understandable why his apostles, sitting with him on the Mount of Olives overlooking Jerusalem, would ask him about the future: “When will these things be, and what will be the sign of your presence and of the conclusion of the system of things?”—Matthew 24:3; Mark 13:4.

6 You will find their question and Jesus’ reply in Matthew chapter 24, Mark chapter 13, and Luke

chapter 21. In many respects the accounts are complementary, but they are not identical. For example, only Luke mentions ‘pestilences in one place after another.’ (Luke 21:10, 11; Matthew 24:7; Mark 13:8) Logically, we should ask, Was Jesus foretelling events just within his hearers’ lifetime, or did he include our time and what the future holds for us? The Apostles Wanted to Know

7 Just days before he was killed, Jesus declared that God had rejected Jerusalem, the Jews’ capital. The city and its grand temple would be destroyed. Some of the apostles then asked for a ‘sign of Jesus’ presence and the conclusion of the system of things.’ (Matthew 23:37–24:3) Undoubtedly they had in mind primarily the Jewish system and Jerusalem, for they did not grasp the scope of what lay ahead. But in answering them Jesus looked far beyond what occurred up to and including 70 C.E. when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem.—Luke 19:11; Acts 1:6, 7.

8 As you can read in the three Gospel accounts, Jesus spoke of nation rising against nation and kingdom against kingdom, food shortages, earthquakes, fearful sights, and heavenly signs. In the years between Jesus’ giving of that sign (33 C.E.) and the desolation of Jerusalem (66-70 C.E.), false prophets and false Christs would arise. The Jews would persecute the Christians, who were preaching Jesus’ message.

9 These features of the sign actually occurred, even as historian Flavius Josephus confirms. He writes that before the Romans ever attacked, false Messiahs instigated rebellion. There were terrible earthquakes in Judea and elsewhere. Wars broke out in many parts of the Roman Empire. Were there major famines? Yes, indeed. (Compare Acts 11:27-30.) What of the Kingdom preaching work? By 60 or 61 C.E., when the book of Colossians was written, “the hope of that good news” of God’s Kingdom had been heard widely in Africa, Asia, and Europe.—Colossians 1:23. “THEN” the End

10 In some respects Jesus presented events as occurring in sequence. He said: “This good news of the kingdom will be preached . . . , and then the end will come.” Bibles in English frequently use “then” with the simple meaning of “therefore” or “but.” (Mark 4:15, 17; Mr 13:23) However, at Matthew 24:14, “then” is based on the Greek adverb *to'te*. Greek experts explain that *to'te* is a “demonstrative adverb of time” used “to introduce that which follows in time” or “to introduce a subsequent event.” Jesus thus predicted that there would be Kingdom preaching and then (‘after that’ or ‘subsequently’) “the end” would come. Which end?

Watchtower Study
Week September 2 – September 8, 2013
“Tell Us, When Will These Things Be?”
Watchtower July 15, 2013
ENDNOTES

11 One fulfillment of Jesus' prophecy can be found in the events leading up to the end of the Jewish system. The wars, earthquakes, food shortages, and so on, that Jesus foretold occurred over a period of three decades. Yet, commencing with Matthew 24:15, Mark 13:14, and Luke 21:20, we read of events that were directly linked to imminent destruction, when the end was at the doorstep.—Note the single dotted line on the chart.

12 Responding to a Jewish revolt in 66 C.E., Romans under Cestius Gallus marched against Jerusalem, surrounding this city that the Jews considered holy. (Matthew 5:35) Despite Jewish counterattacks, the Romans forced entry into the city. They thus began “standing in a holy place,” true to Jesus' prediction at Matthew 24:15 and Mark 13:14. Then there was a surprising development. Though they had surrounded the city, the Romans suddenly withdrew. Christians immediately recognized the fulfillment of Jesus' prophecy, and the withdrawal allowed them to flee from Judea into the mountains across the Jordan. History says they did so.

13 But if the Romans withdrew from around Jerusalem, why did anyone need to flee? Jesus' words showed that what had occurred proved ‘that the desolating of Jerusalem was near.’ (Luke 21:20) Yes, desolating. He foretold ‘a tribulation such as had not occurred from the beginning and would not occur again.’ About three and a half years later, in 70 C.E., Jerusalem actually did experience “great tribulation” from the Roman armies under General Titus. (Matthew 24:21; Mark 13:19) Why, though, would Jesus describe this as a tribulation greater than any before or since?

14 Jerusalem was ravaged by the Babylonians in 607 B.C.E., and the city has seen horrible fighting in our present century. Still, what occurred in 70 C.E. was uniquely a great tribulation. In a campaign of about five months, Titus' warriors defeated the Jews. They killed some 1,100,000 and took nearly 100,000 into captivity. Moreover, the Romans demolished Jerusalem. This proved that the Jewish system of formerly approved worship that centered on the temple had permanently ended. (Hebrews 1:2) Yes, the events of 70 C.E. could rightly be considered ‘tribulation such as has not occurred [on that city, nation, and system] since the world's beginning, no, nor will occur again.’—Matthew 24:21.

As Prophesied, More Was to Follow

15 Jesus, however, did not limit his prediction to the tribulation in the first century. The Bible shows that much was to follow that tribulation, as is suggested by the use of ‘to’te, or “then,” at Matthew 24:23 and Mark 13:21. What would develop in the period following 70 C.E.? After the tribulation on the Jewish system, more

false Christs and false prophets would appear. (Compare Mark 13:6 with Mr 13:21-23.) History confirms that such individuals have arisen over the centuries since Jerusalem's destruction in 70 C.E., though they have not misled people who have sharp spiritual vision and who have been looking to “the presence” of Christ. (Matthew 24:27, 28) Nevertheless, these developments after the great tribulation of 70 C.E. form one indication that Jesus was looking beyond that tribulation, which was only an initial fulfillment.

16 If we compare Matthew 24:15-28 and Mark 13:14-23 with Luke 21:20-24, we find a second indication that Jesus' prediction extended beyond the destruction of Jerusalem. Recall that Luke alone had mentioned pestilences. Similarly, he alone closed this section with Jesus' words: “Jerusalem will be trampled on by the nations, until the appointed times of the nations [“times of the Gentiles,” King James Version] are fulfilled.” (Luke 21:24) The Babylonians removed the Jews' last king in 607 B.C.E., and after that, Jerusalem, standing for God's Kingdom, was trampled on. (2 Kings 25:1-26; 1 Chronicles 29:23; Ezekiel 21:25-27) At Luke 21:24, Jesus indicated that the situation would persist into the future until the time came for God to reestablish a Kingdom.

17 Here is a third indication that Jesus was pointing also to a distant fulfillment: According to the Scriptures, the Messiah was to die and be resurrected, whereupon he would sit at God's right hand until the Father sent him forth subduing. (Psalm 110:1, 2) Jesus alluded to his having to sit at his Father's right hand. (Mark 14:62) The apostle Paul confirmed that the resurrected Jesus was at Jehovah's right hand awaiting the time to be King and God's Executioner.—Romans 8:34; Colossians 3:1; Hebrews 10:12, 13.

18 For a fourth and conclusive indication that Jesus' prophecy about the conclusion of the system of things applies beyond the first century, we can turn to Revelation chapter 6. Writing decades after 70 C.E., the apostle John described a compelling scene of active horsemen. (Revelation 6:2-8) This prophetic view into “the Lord's day”—the day of his presence—identifies our 20th century as a time of notable warfare (Re 6 verse 4), widespread food shortages (Re 6 verses 5 and 6), and “deadly plague” (Re 6 verse 8). Clearly, this parallels what Jesus said in the Gospels and proves that his prophecy has a greater fulfillment in this ‘day of the Lord.’—Revelation 1:10.

19 Informed people acknowledge that the composite sign foretold at Matthew 24:7-14 and Revelation 6:2-8 has been manifest since the first outbreak of world war in 1914. Jehovah's Witnesses have announced worldwide that Jesus' prophecy is now having its second and greater fulfillment, as evidenced by brutal

Watchtower Study
Week September 2 – September 8, 2013
“Tell Us, When Will These Things Be?”
Watchtower July 15, 2013
ENDNOTES

wars, devastating earthquakes, tragic famines, and rampant diseases. On this last point, U.S. News & World Report (July 27, 1992) said: “The AIDS epidemic . . . is sending millions of victims to their death and may soon become the most costly and catastrophic plague in history. The Black Death killed about 25 million suffering souls in the 14th century. But by the year 2000, 30 million to 110 million people will be carrying HIV, the virus that causes AIDS, up from some 12 million today. In the absence of a cure, all face certain death.”

20 What, then, are we to conclude about how Jesus answered the apostles’ inquiry? His prophecy accurately foretold things leading up to and encompassing the destruction of Jerusalem, and it mentioned some things to follow 70 C.E. But most of this was to have a second and greater fulfillment in the future, leading up to a great tribulation that would end the present wicked system of things. This means that Jesus’ prediction at Matthew 24:4-22, and the parallels in Mark and Luke, were fulfilled from 33 C.E. through the tribulation of 70 C.E. Yet, the same verses would have a second fulfillment, which would include a greater tribulation in the future. This larger fulfillment is with us; we can see it daily.

Leading Up to What?

21 Jesus did not end his prophecy with mention of false prophets performing deceptive signs during the long period before ‘the appointed times of the nations would be fulfilled.’ (Luke 21:24; Matthew 24:23-26; Mark 13:21-23) He went on to tell of other startling things to occur, things observed earth wide. These would be associated with the coming of the Son of man in power and glory. Mark 13:24-27 is representative of his continued prophecy:

22 “But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling out of heaven, and the powers that are in the heavens will be shaken. And then they will see the Son of man coming in clouds with great power and glory. And then he will send forth the angels and will gather his chosen ones together from the four winds, from earth’s extremity to heaven’s extremity.”

23 The Son of man, the resurrected Jesus Christ, did not come in that spectacular manner following the destructive end of the Jewish system in 70 C.E. Certainly all the tribes of the earth did not recognize him, as Matthew 24:30 notes, nor did heavenly angels then gather all the anointed Christians from the entire earth. So when would this additional part of Jesus’ stupendous prophecy be fulfilled? Is it finding fulfillment in what is going on around us now, or does it, rather, provide divine insight into things that we can expect in the near future? We should certainly want to

know, for Luke records Jesus’ admonition: “As these things start to occur, raise yourselves erect and lift your heads up, because your deliverance is getting near.”—Luke 21:28.

[Footnotes]

Portions of these chapters can be found in the chart on pages 14 and 15; dotted lines mark off parallel sections.

For historical citations of these events, see The Watchtower of January 15, 1970, pages 43-5.

To ‘te appears over 80 times in Matthew (9 times in Mt chapter 24) and 15 times in the book of Luke. Mark used to ‘te only six times, but four of those involved “the sign.”

British author Matthew Henry commented: “The destruction of Jerusalem by the Chaldeans was very terrible, but this exceeded it. It threatened a universal slaughter of all . . . the Jews.”

Many see in Luke’s account a shift after Luke 21:24. Dr. Leon Morris notes: “Jesus goes on to speak of the times of the Gentiles. . . . In the opinion of most scholars attention now moves to the coming of the Son of man.” Professor R. Ginns writes: “The Coming of the Son of Man—(Mt 24:29-31; Mk 13:24-27). The mention of the ‘times of the Gentiles’ provides an introduction to this theme; [Luke’s] perspective is now carried beyond the ruin of Jerusalem into the future.”

Professor Walter L. Liefeld writes: “It is certainly possible to assume that Jesus’ predictions incorporated two phases: (1) the events of A.D. 70 involving the temple and (2) those in the distant future, described in more apocalyptic terms.” The commentary edited by J. R. Dummelow says: “Many of the most serious difficulties of this great discourse disappear when it is realised that our Lord referred in it not to one event but to two, and that the first was typical of the second. . . . [Luke] 21:24 especially, which speaks of ‘the times of the Gentiles,’ . . . places an indefinite interval between the fall of Jerusalem and the end of the world.”

*****w99 5/1 pp. 8-13 “These Things Must Take Place”*****

“These Things Must Take Place”

“Jesus said to them: ‘. . . These things must take place, but the end is not yet.’”—MATTHEW 24:4-6.

YOU are no doubt interested in your life and in your future. Then you should also be interested in a subject that seized the attention of C. T. Russell back in 1877. Russell, who later founded the Watch Tower Society, wrote The Object and Manner of Our Lord’s Return. This 64-page booklet dealt with Jesus’ return, or future coming. (John 14:3) On one occasion when on the Mount of Olives, the apostles asked about that return:

Watchtower Study
Week September 2 – September 8, 2013
“Tell Us, When Will These Things Be?”
Watchtower July 15, 2013
ENDNOTES

“When will these things be, and what will be the sign of your presence [or, “coming,” King James Version] and of the conclusion of the system of things?”—Matthew 24:3.

2 Do you know and understand Jesus’ answer? It is found in three of the Gospels. Professor D. A. Carson states: “Few chapters of the Bible have called forth more disagreement among interpreters than Matthew 24 and its parallels in Mark 13 and Luke 21.” He then gives his own opinion—just another of the conflicting human views. In the last century or so, many such views reflected a lack of faith. Those offering them held that Jesus never said what we read in the Gospels, that his sayings were later corrupted, or that his prediction failed—views shaped by higher criticism. One commentator even approached Mark’s Gospel ‘through the lens of Mahayana-Buddhist philosophy’!

3 In contrast, Jehovah’s Witnesses accept the authenticity and reliability of the Bible, including what Jesus told the four apostles who were with him on the Mount of Olives three days before his death. Since the days of C. T. Russell, God’s people have progressively gained a clearer understanding of the prophecy Jesus there gave. In the last few years, The Watchtower has clarified yet further their view of this prophecy. Have you absorbed that information, seeing its impact on your life? Let us review it.

A Tragic Fulfillment in the Offing

4 The apostles knew that Jesus was the Messiah. So when they heard him mention his death, resurrection, and return, they must have wondered, ‘If Jesus dies and goes away, how can he carry out the wonderful things that the Messiah is expected to do?’ Further, Jesus spoke of an end for Jerusalem and its temple. The apostles might have wondered, ‘When and how will that occur?’ In trying to understand these things, the apostles asked: “When will these things be, and what will be the sign when all these things are destined to come to a conclusion?”—Mark 13:4; Matthew 16:21, 27, 28; 23:37–24:2.

5 Jesus foretold that there would be wars, famines, pestilences, earthquakes, hatred and persecution of Christians, false messiahs, and a widespread preaching of the good news of the Kingdom. Then the end was to come. (Matthew 24:4-14; Mark 13:5-13; Luke 21:8-19) Jesus said this early in the year 33 C.E. During the following decades, his alert disciples could recognize that the foretold things were in fact occurring in a significant way. Yes, history proves that the sign had a fulfillment at that time, leading to a conclusion of the Jewish system of things at the hands of the Romans in 66-70 C.E. How did that come about?

6 During the hot Judean summer of 66 C.E., Jewish Zealots led an assault on Roman guards in a fort near the temple in Jerusalem, sparking violence elsewhere in the land. In *History of the Jews*, Professor Heinrich Graetz relates: “Cestius Gallus, whose duty it was as Governor of Syria to uphold the honor of Roman arms, . . . could no longer witness the rebellion spreading around him without an effort to stem its progress. He called his legions together, and the neighboring princes voluntarily sent their troops.” This army of 30,000 surrounded Jerusalem. After some fighting, the Jews withdrew behind walls near the temple. “During five successive days the Romans stormed the walls, but were always obliged to fall back before the missiles of the Judæans. It was only on the sixth day that they succeeded in undermining a part of the northern wall in front of the Temple.”

7 Just think how confused the Jews would have been, since they had long felt that God would protect them and their holy city! Jesus’ disciples, though, had been forewarned that calamity awaited Jerusalem. Jesus had foretold: “The days will come upon you when your enemies will build around you a fortification with pointed stakes and will encircle you and distress you from every side, and they will dash you and your children within you to the ground, and they will not leave a stone upon a stone in you.” (Luke 19:43, 44) But would that spell death for Christians inside Jerusalem in 66 C.E.?

8 When replying to the apostles on the Mount of Olives, Jesus predicted: “Those days will be days of a tribulation such as has not occurred from the beginning of the creation which God created until that time, and will not occur again. In fact, unless Jehovah had cut short the days, no flesh would be saved. But on account of the chosen ones whom he has chosen he has cut short the days.” (Mark 13:19, 20; Matthew 24:21, 22) So the days would be cut short and “the chosen ones” saved. Who were they? Certainly not rebellious Jews who claimed to worship Jehovah but who had rejected his Son. (John 19:1-7; Acts 2:22, 23, 36) The true chosen ones back then were those Jews and non-Jews who exercised faith in Jesus as Messiah and Savior. God had chosen such ones, and on Pentecost 33 C.E., he had formed them into a new spiritual nation, “the Israel of God.”—Galatians 6:16; Luke 18:7; Acts 10:34-45; 1 Peter 2:9.

9 Were the days “cut short” and the anointed chosen ones in Jerusalem saved? Professor Graetz suggests: “[Cestius Gallus] did not deem it advisable to continue the combat against heroic enthusiasts and embark on a lengthy campaign at that season, when the autumn rains would soon commence . . . and might prevent the army from receiving provisions. On that account probably he thought it more prudent to retrace his steps.” Whatever Cestius Gallus was thinking, the

Watchtower Study
Week September 2 – September 8, 2013
“Tell Us, When Will These Things Be?”
Watchtower July 15, 2013
ENDNOTES

Roman army retreated from the city, with grave losses inflicted by the pursuing Jews.

10 That surprising Roman retreat allowed “flesh”—Jesus’ disciples who were at risk inside Jerusalem—to be saved. History records that when this window of opportunity opened, Christians fled the region. What a display of God’s ability to foreknow the future and to ensure the survival of his worshipers! Yet, what of unbelieving Jews who remained in Jerusalem and Judea?

Contemporaries Would See It

11 Many Jews felt that their system of worship, centered on the temple, would long continue. But Jesus said: “Learn from the fig tree . . . this point: Just as soon as its young branch grows tender and it puts forth leaves, you know that summer is near. Likewise also you, when you see all these things, know that he is near at the doors. Truly I say to you that this generation will by no means pass away until all these things occur. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will by no means pass away.”—Matthew 24:32-35.

12 In the years leading up to 66 C.E., Christians would have seen many of the preliminary elements of the composite sign being fulfilled—wars, famines, even an extensive preaching of the good news of the Kingdom. (Acts 11:28; Colossians 1:23) When, though, would the end come? What did Jesus mean when he said: ‘This generation [Greek, ge-ne-a] will not pass away’? Jesus had often called the contemporaneous mass of opposing Jews, including religious leaders, ‘a wicked, adulterous generation.’ (Matthew 11:16; 12:39, 45; 16:4; 17:17; 23:36) So when, on the Mount of Olives, he again spoke of “this generation,” he evidently did not mean the entire race of Jews throughout history; nor did he mean his followers, even though they were “a chosen race.” (1 Peter 2:9) Neither was Jesus saying that “this generation” is a period of time.

13 Rather, Jesus had in mind the opposing Jews back then who would experience the fulfillment of the sign he gave. Regarding the reference to “this generation” at Luke 21:32, Professor Joel B. Green notes: “In the Third Gospel, ‘this generation’ (and related phrases) has regularly signified a category of people who are resistant to the purpose of God. . . . [It refers] to people who stubbornly turn their backs on the divine purpose.”

14 The wicked generation of Jewish opposers who could observe the sign being fulfilled would also experience the end. (Matthew 24:6, 13, 14) And that they did! In 70 C.E., the Roman army returned, led by Titus, son of Emperor Vespasian. The suffering of the Jews who were again bottled up in the city is almost beyond belief. Eyewitness Flavius Josephus reports that by the time the Romans demolished the city,

about 1,100,000 Jews had died and some 100,000 were taken captive, most of those soon to perish horribly from starvation or in Roman theaters. Truly, the tribulation of 66-70 C.E. was the greatest that Jerusalem and the Jewish system had ever experienced or would ever experience. How different the outcome was for Christians who had heeded Jesus’ prophetic warning and had left Jerusalem after the departure of the Roman armies in 66 C.E.! The anointed Christian “chosen ones” were “saved,” or kept safe, in 70 C.E.—Matthew 24:16, 22.

Another Fulfillment to Come

15 However, that was not the finale. Earlier, Jesus had indicated that after the city was devastated, he would come in Jehovah’s name. (Matthew 23:38, 39; 24:2) He then made this clearer in his prophecy uttered on the Mount of Olives. Having mentioned the coming “great tribulation,” he said that afterward false Christs would appear, and Jerusalem would be trampled on by the nations for an extended period. (Matthew 24:21, 23-28; Luke 21:24) Could it be that another, a greater, fulfillment was to come? The facts answer yes. When we compare Revelation 6:2-8 (written after the tribulation on Jerusalem in 70 C.E.) with Matthew 24:6-8 and Luke 21:10, 11, we see that warfare, food shortages, and plague on a greater scale lay ahead. This greater fulfillment of Jesus’ words has been occurring since World War I erupted in 1914.

16 For decades now, Jehovah’s Witnesses have taught that the current fulfillment of the sign proves that a “great tribulation” is yet to come. The present wicked “generation” will see that tribulation. It seems that there will again be an opening phase (an attack on all false religion), just as Gallus’ attack in 66 C.E. opened the tribulation on Jerusalem. Then, after an interval of unspecified length, the end will come—destruction on a worldwide scale, paralleling that in 70 C.E.

17 Referring to the tribulation just ahead of us, Jesus said: “Immediately after the tribulation of those days [the destruction of false religion] the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. And then the sign of the Son of man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will beat themselves in lamentation, and they will see the Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.”—Matthew 24:29, 30.

18 Hence, Jesus himself says that “after the tribulation of those days,” celestial phenomena of some sort will occur. (Compare Joel 2:28-32; 3:15.) This will so startle and shock disobedient humans that they will “beat themselves in lamentation.” Many will “become faint out of fear and expectation of the things coming

Watchtower Study
Week September 2 – September 8, 2013
“Tell Us, When Will These Things Be?”
Watchtower July 15, 2013
ENDNOTES

upon the inhabited earth.” But this will not be the case with true Christians! These ‘will lift their heads up, because their deliverance is getting near.’—Luke 21:25, 26, 28.

Judgment Ahead!

19 Note that Matthew 24:29-31 foretells that (1) the Son of man comes, (2) this coming will be with great glory, (3) the angels will be with him, and (4) all the tribes of the earth will see him. Jesus repeats these elements in the parable of the sheep and the goats. (Matthew 25:31-46) Hence, we can conclude that this parable deals with the time, after the opening outbreak of tribulation, when Jesus will come with his angels and sit down on his throne to judge. (John 5:22; Acts 17:31; compare 1 Kings 7:7; Daniel 7:10, 13, 14, 22, 26; Matthew 19:28.) Who will be judged, and with what result? The parable shows that Jesus will give attention to all nations, as if they were assembled right before his celestial throne.

20 Sheeplike men and women will be separated to Jesus’ right side of favor. Why? Because they used their opportunities to do good to his brothers—anoointed Christians, who will share in Christ’s heavenly Kingdom. (Daniel 7:27; Hebrews 2:9–3:1) In line with the parable, millions of sheeplike Christians have recognized Jesus’ spiritual brothers and have been working in support of them. As a result, the “great crowd” have the Bible-based hope of surviving “the great tribulation” and then living forever in Paradise, the earthly realm of God’s Kingdom.—Revelation 7:9, 14; 21:3, 4; John 10:16.

21 What a different outcome there will be for the goats! They are described at Matthew 24:30 as ‘beating themselves in lamentation’ when Jesus comes. And well they should, for they will have built up a record of rejecting the Kingdom good news, of opposing Jesus’ disciples, and of preferring the world that is passing away. (Matthew 10:16-18; 1 John 2:15-17) Jesus—not any of his disciples on earth—determines who the goats are. Of them he says: “These will depart into everlasting cutting-off.”—Matthew 25:46.

22 Our progress in understanding the prophecy in Matthew chapters 24 and 25 has been thrilling. However, there is a part of Jesus’ prophecy that merits our further attention—‘the disgusting thing that causes desolation standing in a holy place.’ Jesus urged his followers to use discernment regarding this and to be ready to take action. (Matthew 24:15, 16) What is this “disgusting thing”? When does it stand in a holy place? And how are our present and future life prospects involved? The following article will discuss this.

^ par. 8 Paragraph 8: One of the events mentioned in these verses is the ‘gathering of the chosen ones.’ (Matt. 24:31) Hence, it appears that all anoointed ones

who still remain on earth after the initial part of the great tribulation has passed will at some point be raised to heaven before the outbreak of the battle of Armageddon. This adjusts what was stated on this subject in “Questions From Readers” in The Watchtower of August 15, 1990, page 30.

Matt. 24:31 And he will send forth his angels with a great trumpet sound, and they will gather his chosen ones together from the four winds, from one extremity of the heavens to their other extremity.

*****w90 8/15 p. 30 Questions From Readers*****

Questions From Readers

? Will some anoointed Christians survive the “great tribulation” to live on earth in the new world before being taken to heaven?

Pointedly, the Bible does not say.

Christians have long been interested in the privileges that God might extend to them. (Acts 1:6) That has especially been true in our time since the Kingdom was established. (Matthew 24:3, 24, 34) With the end of this wicked system to come in their time, Christians have wondered whether some spirit-anoointed ones might live through “the war of the great day of God” and serve on earth for a time before receiving their heavenly reward. (Revelation 16:14)

The Bible does not say that this will occur, yet certain patterns and prophecies have been taken to indicate that it might. Rather than be dogmatic, we can watch to see how God will handle things.

Some Biblical events have parallels later on among God’s people. For instance, we know that Jonah was in a large fish for three days and three nights. Some people would view that as simply an example of divine deliverance, but Jesus said that it was a prophetic pattern of how he would be in the grave for a comparable period before his resurrection. (Jonah 1:17; Matthew 12:40) Yes, Jonah’s experience was a prophetic type. Understandably, God’s servants have looked at prophecies and specific Bible accounts to see whether these might indicate how Jehovah will yet deal with them.

As an example involving Bible prophecy, The Watch Tower of December 15, 1928, discussed Micah 5:2-15. The book of Micah dealt with ‘the Assyrian’s’ desolating of Samaria and the Jews’ return from exile in Babylon. (Micah 1:1, 5-7; 4:10) But it also pointed to later developments, such as the Messiah’s birth in Bethlehem. (Micah 5:2) Micah prophesied that after their deliverance from “the Assyrian,” “the remaining ones of Jacob” would become “like dew from Jehovah” and “like a maned young lion among droves of sheep.” (Micah 5:6-8) The Watch Tower commented: “This

Watchtower Study
Week September 2 – September 8, 2013
“Tell Us, When Will These Things Be?”
Watchtower July 15, 2013
ENDNOTES

may be taken as an indication that some of the remnant will be on earth even after Armageddon is fought and will then have some more work to do in the name of the Lord and to his praise and glory.” Notice the modest, reasonable language used to introduce this possibility: “This may be taken as an indication.”

What of a Bible account that might parallel such survival on earth? One example that has been presented concerns Noah and his family. Noah has been viewed as typifying Jesus in this time of the end. (Genesis 6:8-10; Matthew 24:37) As Noah led his wife and their three sons and daughters-in-law through the end of that ancient system, Christ will provide leadership for the remnant of his bride class and those who become children of the “Eternal Father,” Jesus. Noah’s wife survived the Flood and shared in the renewing of true worship on a cleansed earth. A parallel might be the survival into the new world of a remnant of the bride class.—Isaiah 9:6, 7; 2 Corinthians 11:2; Revelation 21:2, 9.

Other Biblical accounts have also been viewed as suggesting that some of the anointed might live into the new world. For example, Jeremiah survived the destruction of Jerusalem; “the man” with the secretary’s inkhorn remained to see the executional work before he went back to give his report.—Ezekiel 9:4, 8, 11.

Comments about the possibility that some of the anointed might survive into the new world are made with good intentions and in the light of Biblical precedents for trying to understand prophecies or patterns that could have later parallels. If it turns out that none of the anointed are left on earth, there will be no reason for dissatisfaction. We already have accepted that Biblical matters are understood better as time passes. For instance, The Watchtower of July 15, 1981, discussed Micah 5:6-9 again and explained that “the remnant of spiritual Israelites have not had to wait until after . . . Har-Magedon in order to be as a ‘dew’ of refreshment to people.” This discussion again offered the possibility that the remnant might survive God’s great war and for a while “continue to be as a refreshing ‘dew’ to the ‘great crowd’ of ‘other sheep.’” We can see, though, that the passing of time and the

^ par. 11 Paragraph 11: See The Watchtower, October 15, 1995, pages 18-28.

*****w95 10/15 pp. 18-23 How Will You Stand Before the Judgment Seat?*** >>**

How Will You Stand Before the Judgment Seat?
“When the Son of man arrives in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit down on his glorious throne.”—MATTHEW 25:31.

‘GUILTY OR INNOCENT?’ Many wonder as they hear reports about some court case. Judges and jury members may try to be honest, but does justice usually prevail? Have you not heard of injustice and inequities in the judicial process? Such injustice is not new, as we see in Jesus’ illustration found at Luke 18:1-8.

2 Whatever your experience with human justice, note Jesus’ conclusion: “Shall not God cause justice to be done for his chosen ones who cry out to him day and night . . . ? I tell you, He will cause justice to be done to them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of man arrives, will he really find the faith on the earth?”

3 Yes, Jehovah will see that his servants finally receive justice. Jesus is involved, too, especially now because we are living in “the last days” of the present wicked system. Jehovah will soon use his powerful Son to wipe wickedness off the earth. (2 Timothy 3:1; 2 Thessalonians 1:7, 8; Revelation 19:11-16) We can gain insight into Jesus’ role from one of the last illustrations he gave, often called the parable of the sheep and the goats.

4 We have long felt that the parable depicted Jesus’ sitting down as King in 1914 and since then making judgments—everlasting life for people proving to be like sheep, permanent death for the goats. But a reconsideration of the parable points to an adjusted understanding of its timing and what it illustrates. This refinement reinforces the importance of our preaching work and the significance of people’s response. To see the basis for this deeper understanding of the parable, let us consider what the Bible shows about Jehovah and Jesus, both as Kings and as Judges. Jehovah as the Supreme Judge

5 Jehovah rules the universe with power over all. Having no beginning and no end, he is “King of eternity.” (1 Timothy 1:17; Psalm 90:2, 4; Revelation 15:3) He has authority to make statutes, or laws, and to enforce these. But his authority includes being a Judge. Isaiah 33:22 says: “Jehovah is our Judge, Jehovah is our Statute-giver, Jehovah is our King; he himself will save us.”

6 God’s servants have long recognized Jehovah as the Judge of cases and issues. For example, after “the Judge of all the earth” had weighed the evidence about the wickedness of Sodom and Gomorrah, he both judged that the inhabitants merited destruction and enforced that righteous judgment. (Genesis 18:20-33; Job 34:10-12) How it should reassure us to know that Jehovah is a righteous Judge who can always carry out his judgments!

7 In ancient Israel, Jehovah sometimes rendered judgment directly. Would you not have been comforted

Watchtower Study
Week September 2 – September 8, 2013
“Tell Us, When Will These Things Be?”
Watchtower July 15, 2013
ENDNOTES

back then to know that a perfect Judge was deciding matters? (Leviticus 24:10-16; Numbers 15:32-36; 27:1-11) God also provided “judicial decisions” that were altogether good as standards for judging. (Leviticus 25:18, 19; Nehemiah 9:13; Psalm 19:9, 10; 119:7, 75, 164; 147:19, 20) He is “Judge of all the earth,” so all of us are affected.—Hebrews 12:23.

8 We have “eyewitness” testimony bearing on this matter. The prophet Daniel was given a vision of ferocious beasts that stood for governments or empires. (Daniel 7:1-8, 17) He added: “There were thrones placed and the Ancient of Days sat down. His clothing was white just like snow.” (Daniel 7:9) Note that Daniel saw thrones “and the Ancient of Days [Jehovah] sat down.” Ask yourself, ‘Was Daniel here witnessing God’s becoming King?’

9 Well, when we read that someone “sat down” on a throne, we might think of his becoming a king, for the Bible sometimes uses such language. For example: “When [Zimri] began to reign, as soon as he sat down upon his throne, he . . .” (1 Kings 16:11; 2 Kings 10:30; 15:12; Jeremiah 33:17) A Messianic prophecy said: “He must sit down and rule on his throne.” Hence, to ‘sit on a throne’ can mean to become king. (Zechariah 6:12, 13) Jehovah is described as a King who sits on a throne. (1 Kings 22:19; Isaiah 6:1; Revelation 4:1-3) He is “King of eternity.” Yet, as he asserted a new aspect of sovereignty, he could be said to have become King, as if sitting down on his throne anew.—1 Chronicles 16:1, 31; Isaiah 52:7; Revelation 11:15-17; 15:3; 19:1, 2, 6.

10 But here is a key point: A prime function of ancient kings was that of hearing cases and rendering judgments. (Proverbs 29:14) Recall Solomon’s wise judgment when two women claimed the same baby. (1 Kings 3:16-28; 2 Chronicles 9:8) One of his governmental buildings was “the Porch of the Throne where he would do judging,” also called “the porch of judgment.” (1 Kings 7:7) Jerusalem was described as the place where “the thrones for judgment have been sitting.” (Psalm 122:5) Clearly, ‘sitting down on a throne’ can also mean exercising judicial authority.—Exodus 18:13; Proverbs 20:8.

11 Now let us return to the scene where Daniel saw ‘the Ancient of Days sit down.’ Daniel 7:10 adds: “The Court took its seat, and there were books that were opened.” Yes, the Ancient of Days was sitting to render judgment about world domination and to judge the Son of man as worthy to rule. (Daniel 7:13, 14) Then we read that “the Ancient of Days came and judgment itself was given in favor of the holy ones,” those judged fit to rule with the Son of man. (Daniel 7:22) Finally “the Court itself proceeded to sit” and render adverse judgment on the last world power.—Daniel 7:26.

12 Consequently, Daniel’s seeing God ‘sit on a throne’ meant His coming to render judgment. Earlier David sang: “You [Jehovah] have executed my judgment and my cause; you have sat on the throne judging with righteousness.” (Psalm 9:4, 7) And Joel wrote: “Let the nations be aroused and come up to the low plain of Jehoshaphat; for there I [Jehovah] shall sit in order to judge all the nations.” (Joel 3:12; compare Isaiah 16:5.) Both Jesus and Paul were in judicial situations in which a human sat to hear a case and render judgment.—John 19:12-16; Acts 23:3; 25:6. Jesus’ Position

13 Jehovah is both King and Judge. What of Jesus? The angel announcing his birth said: “Jehovah God will give him the throne of David his father, . . . and there will be no end of his kingdom.” (Luke 1:32, 33) Jesus would be permanent heir of the Davidic kingship. (2 Samuel 7:12-16) He would rule from heaven, for David said: “The utterance of Jehovah to my Lord [Jesus] is: ‘Sit at my right hand until I place your enemies as a stool for your feet.’ The rod of your strength Jehovah will send out of Zion, saying: ‘Go subduing in the midst of your enemies.’”—Psalm 110:1-4.

14 When would that be? Jesus did not rule as King while a human. (John 18:33-37) In 33 C.E., he died, was resurrected, and ascended to heaven. Hebrews 10:12 says: “This man offered one sacrifice for sins perpetually and sat down at the right hand of God.” What authority did Jesus have? “[God] seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above every government and authority and power and lordship . . . and made him head over all things to the congregation.” (Ephesians 1:20-22) Because Jesus then had kingly authority over Christians, Paul could write that Jehovah “delivered us from the authority of the darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of the Son of his love.”—Colossians 1:13; 3:1.

15 At that time, however, Jesus did not act as King and Judge over the nations. He was seated next to God, awaiting the time to act as King of God’s Kingdom. Paul wrote of him: “With reference to which one of the angels has he ever said: ‘Sit at my right hand, until I place your enemies as a stool for your feet?’”—Hebrews 1:13.

16 Jehovah’s Witnesses have published much evidence that Jesus’ period of waiting expired in 1914, when he became ruler of God’s Kingdom in the invisible heavens. Revelation 11:15, 18 says: “The kingdom of the world did become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will rule as king forever and ever.” “But the nations became wrathful, and your own wrath came.” Yes, the nations expressed wrath toward one another during World War I. (Luke 21:24) The wars, earthquakes, pestilences, food shortages,

Watchtower Study
Week September 2 – September 8, 2013
“Tell Us, When Will These Things Be?”
Watchtower July 15, 2013
ENDNOTES

and the like, that we have seen since 1914 confirm that Jesus is now ruling in God’s Kingdom, and the world’s final end is near.—Matthew 24:3-14.

17 By way of a brief review: God can be said to sit on a throne as King, but in another sense he can sit down on his throne to judge. In 33 C.E., Jesus sat at God’s right hand, and he is now King of the Kingdom. But does Jesus, now reigning as King, also serve as Judge? And why should this concern us, especially at this time?

18 Jehovah, who has the right to appoint judges, chose Jesus as a Judge meeting His standards. Jesus showed this when speaking about people becoming spiritually alive: “The Father judges no one at all, but he has committed all the judging to the Son.” (John 5:22) Yet, Jesus’ judicial role goes beyond that kind of judging, for he is judge of the living and of the dead. (Acts 10:42; 2 Timothy 4:1) Paul once declared: “[God] has set a day in which he purposes to judge the inhabited earth in righteousness by a man [Jesus] whom he has appointed, and he has furnished a guarantee to all men in that he has resurrected him.”—Acts 17:31; Psalm 72:2-7.

19 Are we thus justified in concluding that Jesus sits down on a glorious throne in the specific role of Judge? Yes. Jesus told the apostles: “In the re-creation, when the Son of man sits down upon his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also yourselves sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.” (Matthew 19:28) Although Jesus is now King of the Kingdom, his further activity mentioned at Matthew 19:28 will include sitting on a throne to judge during the Millennium. At that time he will judge all mankind, the righteous and the unrighteous. (Acts 24:15) It is helpful to keep this in mind as we turn our attention to one of Jesus’ parables that relates to our time and to our lives.
What Does the Parable Say?

20 Shortly before Jesus died, his apostles asked him: “When will these things be, and what will be the sign of your presence and of the conclusion of the system of things?” (Matthew 24:3) Jesus foretold significant developments on earth before ‘the end would come.’ Shortly before that end, the nations will “see the Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.”—Matthew 24:14, 29, 30.

21 How, though, will people in those nations fare when the Son of man arrives in his glory? Let us find out from the parable of the sheep and the goats, which begins with the words: “When the Son of man arrives in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit down on his glorious throne. And all the nations will be gathered before him.”—Matthew 25:31, 32.

22 Does this parable apply when Jesus sat down in kingly power in 1914, as we have long understood? Well, Matthew 25:34 does speak of him as King, so the parable logically finds application since Jesus became King in 1914. But what judging did he do soon thereafter? It was not a judging of “all the nations.” Rather, he turned his attention to those claiming to make up “the house of God.” (1 Peter 4:17) In line with Malachi 3:1-3, Jesus, as Jehovah’s messenger, judicially inspected the anointed Christians remaining on earth. It was also time for judicial sentence on Christendom, who falsely claimed to be “the house of God.” (Revelation 17:1, 2; 18:4-8) Yet nothing indicates that at that time, or for that matter since, Jesus sat to judge people of all the nations finally as sheep or goats.

23 If we analyze Jesus’ activity in the parable, we observe him finally judging all the nations. The parable does not show that such judging would continue over an extended period of many years, as if every person dying during these past decades were judged worthy of everlasting death or everlasting life. It seems that the majority who have died in recent decades have gone to mankind’s common grave. (Revelation 6:8; 20:13) The parable, though, depicts the time when Jesus judges the people of “all the nations” who are then alive and facing the execution of his judicial sentence.

24 In other words, the parable points to the future when the Son of man will come in his glory. He will sit down to judge people then living. His judgment will be based on what they have manifested themselves to be. At that time “the distinction between a righteous one and a wicked one” will have been clearly established. (Malachi 3:18) The actual pronouncing and executing of judgment will be carried out in a limited time. Jesus will render just decisions based on what has become evident about individuals.—See also 2 Corinthians 5:10.

25 This means, then, that Jesus’ ‘sitting down on his glorious throne’ for judgment, mentioned at Matthew 25:31, applies to the future point when this powerful King will sit down to pronounce and execute judgment on the nations. Yes, the judgment scene that involves Jesus at Matthew 25:31-33, 46 is comparable to the scene in Daniel chapter 7, where the reigning King, the Ancient of Days, sat down to carry out his role as Judge.

26 Understanding the parable of the sheep and the goats in this way indicates that the rendering of judgment on the sheep and the goats is future. It will take place after “the tribulation” mentioned at Matthew 24:29, 30 breaks out and the Son of man ‘arrives in his glory.’ (Compare Mark 13:24-26.) Then, with the entire wicked system at its end, Jesus will hold court and

Watchtower Study
Week September 2 – September 8, 2013
“Tell Us, When Will These Things Be?”
Watchtower July 15, 2013
ENDNOTES

render and execute judgment.—John 5:30; 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10.

27 This clarifies our understanding of the timing of Jesus' parable, which shows when the sheep and the goats will be judged. But how does it affect us who are zealously preaching the Kingdom good news? (Matthew 24:14) Does it make our work less significant, or does it bring a greater weight of responsibility? Let us see in the next article how we are affected.

*****w95 10/15 pp. 23-28 What Future for the Sheep and the Goats?*****

What Future for the Sheep and the Goats?

“He will separate people one from another, just as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.”—MATTHEW 25:32.

JESUS CHRIST certainly was the greatest Teacher on earth. (John 7:46) One of his teaching methods was the use of parables, or illustrations. (Matthew 13:34, 35) These were simple yet powerful in conveying deep spiritual and prophetic truths.

2 In the parable of the sheep and the goats, Jesus pointed to a time for him to act in a special capacity: “When the Son of man arrives in his glory, and . . .” (Matthew 25:31) This should interest us because it is the illustration with which Jesus concludes his reply to the question: “What will be the sign of your presence and of the conclusion of the system of things?” (Matthew 24:3) But what does this mean for us?

3 Jesus foretold striking developments to come “immediately after” the outbreak of great tribulation, developments we await. He said that then “the sign of the Son of man” would appear. This will profoundly affect “all the tribes of the earth” who will “see the Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.” The Son of man will be accompanied by “his angels.” (Matthew 24:21, 29-31) What of the parable of the sheep and the goats? Modern Bibles put it in Mt chapter 25, but it is part of Jesus' reply, giving further details about his coming in glory and focusing on his judging of “all the nations.”—Matthew 25:32.

Figures in the Parable

4 Jesus begins the parable by saying: “When the Son of man arrives.” You likely know who “the Son of man” is. Gospel writers often applied that expression to Jesus. Even Jesus himself did so, no doubt having in mind Daniel's vision of “someone like a son of man” approaching the Ancient of Days to receive “rulership and dignity and kingdom.” (Daniel 7:13, 14; Matthew 26:63, 64; Mark 14:61, 62) While Jesus is the principal one in this parable, he is not alone. Earlier in this

discourse, as quoted at Matthew 24:30, 31, he said that when the Son of man ‘comes with power and great glory,’ his angels will play a vital role. Similarly, the parable of the sheep and the goats shows angels with Jesus when he ‘sits down on his glorious throne’ to judge. (Compare Matthew 16:27.) But the Judge and his angels are in heaven, so are humans discussed in the parable?

5 A glance at the parable reveals three groups that we need to identify. In addition to the sheep and the goats, the Son of man adds the third group whose identity is pivotal to identifying the sheep and the goats. Jesus calls this third group his spiritual brothers. (Matthew 25:40, 45) They must be true worshipers, for Jesus said: “Whoever does the will of my Father . . . , the same is my brother, and sister, and mother.” (Matthew 12:50; John 20:17) More to the point, Paul wrote of Christians who are part of “Abraham's seed” and who are sons of God. He called these Jesus' “brothers” and “partakers of the heavenly calling.”—Hebrews 2:9–3:1; Galatians 3:26, 29.

6 Why did Jesus mention “the least” of his brothers? Those words echo what the apostles heard him say earlier. When contrasting John the Baptist, who died before Jesus and therefore had an earthly hope, with those attaining to heavenly life, Jesus said: “There has not been raised up a greater than John the Baptist; but a person that is a lesser one in the kingdom of the heavens is greater than he is.” (Matthew 11:11) Some going to heaven may have been prominent in the congregation, like the apostles, and others less so, but they are all Jesus' spiritual brothers. (Luke 16:10; 1 Corinthians 15:9; Ephesians 3:8; Hebrews 8:11) Thus, even if some seemed insignificant on earth, they were his brothers and should have been treated accordingly.

Who Are the Sheep and the Goats?

7 We read concerning the judging of the sheep: “[Jesus] will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who have been blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the founding of the world. For I became hungry and you gave me something to eat; I got thirsty and you gave me something to drink. I was a stranger and you received me hospitably; naked, and you clothed me. I fell sick and you looked after me. I was in prison and you came to me.’ Then the righteous ones will answer him with the words, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty, and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and receive you hospitably, or naked, and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to you?’ And in reply the king will say to them, ‘Truly I say to you, To the extent that you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.’”—Matthew 25:34-40.

Watchtower Study
Week September 2 – September 8, 2013
“Tell Us, When Will These Things Be?”
Watchtower July 15, 2013
ENDNOTES

8 Obviously, the sheep judged worthy of being on Jesus' right side of honor and favor represent a class of humans. (Ephesians 1:20; Hebrews 1:3) What did they do and when? Jesus says that they kindly, respectfully, and generously gave him food, drink, and clothing, aiding him when he was sick or in prison. When the sheep say that they had not done this to Jesus personally, he points out that they did support his spiritual brothers, the remnant of anointed Christians, so in that sense they did it to him.

9 The parable does not apply during the Millennium, for the anointed will not then be humans suffering hunger, thirst, sickness, or imprisonment. Many of them, though, have experienced such during the conclusion of this system of things. Ever since Satan was cast down to earth, he has made the remnant a special object of his fury, bringing on them ridicule, torture, and death.—Revelation 12:17.

10 Is Jesus saying that everyone doing a small kindness to one of his brothers, such as offering a piece of bread or a glass of water, qualifies as one of these sheep? Granted, rendering such kindnesses may reflect human kindness, but really, it seems that much more is involved with the sheep of this parable. Jesus was hardly referring, for example, to atheists or clergymen who happen to do a kind act to one of his brothers. On the contrary, Jesus twice called the sheep “righteous ones.” (Matthew 25:37, 46) So the sheep must be ones who over a period of time have come to the aid of—actively supporting—Christ's brothers and have exercised faith to the extent of receiving a righteous standing before God.

11 Over the centuries, many such as Abraham have enjoyed a righteous standing. (James 2:21-23) Noah, Abraham, and other faithful ones count among the “other sheep” who will inherit life in Paradise under God's Kingdom. In recent times millions more have taken up true worship as other sheep and have become “one flock” with the anointed. (John 10:16; Revelation 7:9) These with earthly hopes recognize Jesus' brothers as ambassadors of the Kingdom and have therefore aided them—literally and spiritually. Jesus counts as done to him what the other sheep do for his brothers on earth. Such ones who are alive when he comes to judge the nations will be judged as sheep.

12 If the other sheep are now preaching the good news with the anointed and aiding them, why would they ask: “Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty, and give you something to drink?” (Matthew 25:37) There could be various reasons. This is a parable. By means of it, Jesus shows his deep concern for his spiritual brothers; he feels with them, suffers with them. Jesus had earlier said: “He that

receives you receives me also, and he that receives me receives him also that sent me forth.” (Matthew 10:40) In this illustration, Jesus extends the principle, showing that what is done (good or bad) to his brothers reaches even into heaven; it is as if it is done to him in heaven. Also, Jesus here emphasizes Jehovah's standard for judging, making it clear that God's judgment, whether favorable or condemnatory, is valid and just. The goats cannot offer the excuse, ‘Well, if only we had seen you directly.’

13 Once we appreciate when it is that the judgment shown in this parable is rendered, we get a clearer view of who the goats are. The fulfillment is when “the sign of the Son of man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will beat themselves in lamentation, and they will see the Son of man coming . . . with power and great glory.” (Matthew 24:29, 30) Survivors of the tribulation on Babylon the Great who have treated the King's brothers despitefully may now desperately address the Judge as “Lord,” hoping to save their lives.—Matthew 7:22, 23; compare Revelation 6:15-17.

14 However, Jesus' judgment will not be based on desperate claims from former churchgoers, atheists, or others. (2 Thessalonians 1:8) Instead, the judge will review the heart condition and past actions of people toward even “one of these least ones [of his brothers].” Admittedly, the number of anointed Christians left on earth is declining. However, as long as the anointed, making up “the faithful and discreet slave,” continue to provide spiritual food and direction, prospective sheep have an opportunity to do good to the slave class, just as the ‘great crowd out of all nations and tribes and peoples’ have done.—Revelation 7:9, 14.

15 How have Christ's brothers and the millions of other sheep united with them as one flock been treated? Many people may not personally have attacked Christ's representatives, but neither have they treated his people lovingly. Preferring the wicked world, goatlike ones reject the Kingdom message, whether hearing it directly or indirectly. (1 John 2:15-17) Of course, in the final analysis, Jesus is the one who is appointed to render judgment. It is not for us to determine who are sheep and who are goats.—Mark 2:8; Luke 5:22; John 2:24, 25; Romans 14:10-12; 1 Corinthians 4:5.

What Future for Each Group?

16 Jesus gave his judgment of the sheep: “Come, you who have been blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the founding of the world.” What a warm invitation—“Come”! To what? To everlasting life, as he expressed in summation: “The righteous [will enter] into everlasting life.”—Matthew 25:34, 46.

Watchtower Study
Week September 2 – September 8, 2013
“Tell Us, When Will These Things Be?”
Watchtower July 15, 2013
ENDNOTES

17 In the parable of the talents, Jesus showed what is required of those who will rule with him in heaven, but in this parable he shows what is expected of the Kingdom's subjects. (Matthew 25:14-23) Pointedly, because of their undivided support of Jesus' brothers, the sheep inherit a place in the earthly realm of his Kingdom. They will enjoy life on a paradise earth—a prospect that God prepared for them “from the founding of the world” of redeemable humans.—Luke 11:50, 51.

18 What a contrast is the judgment executed on the goats! “Then he will say, in turn, to those on his left, ‘Be on your way from me, you who have been cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the Devil and his angels. For I became hungry, but you gave me nothing to eat, and I got thirsty, but you gave me nothing to drink. I was a stranger, but you did not receive me hospitably; naked, but you did not clothe me; sick and in prison, but you did not look after me.’ Then they also will answer with the words, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison and did not minister to you?’ Then he will answer them with the words, ‘Truly I say to you, To the extent that you did not do it to one of these least ones, you did not do it to me.’”—Matthew 25:41-45.

19 Bible students know that this cannot mean that immortal souls of goatlike ones will suffer in an eternal fire. No, for humans are souls; they do not possess immortal souls. (Genesis 2:7; Ecclesiastes 9:5, 10; Ezekiel 18:4) By sentencing the goats to “everlasting fire,” the Judge means destruction devoid of a future hope, which will also be the permanent end for the Devil and his demons. (Revelation 20:10, 14) Hence, Jehovah's Judge sets out opposites. He tells the sheep, “Come”; the goats, “Be on your way from me.” The sheep will inherit “everlasting life.” The goats will receive “everlasting cutting-off.”—Matthew 25:46.
What Does It Mean for Us?

20 The four apostles who heard Jesus' reply about the sign of his presence and the conclusion of the system had much to consider. They would need to keep awake and on the watch. (Matthew 24:42) They would also need to do the witnessing work mentioned at Mark 13:10. Jehovah's Witnesses are energetically engaged in that work today.

21 What, though, does this fresh understanding of the parable of the sheep and the goats mean to us? Well, people are already taking sides. Some are on ‘the broad road leading off into destruction,’ while others try to stay on ‘the cramped road leading off into life.’ (Matthew 7:13, 14) But the time when Jesus will pronounce final judgment on the sheep and the goats depicted in the parable is yet ahead. When the Son of man comes in the role of Judge, he will determine that

many true Christians—actually “a great crowd” of dedicated sheep—will qualify to pass through the final part of “the great tribulation” into the new world. That prospect should now be a source of joy. (Revelation 7:9, 14) On the other hand, vast numbers out of “all the nations” will have proved themselves to be like stubborn goats. They “will depart into everlasting cutting-off.” What a relief for the earth!

22 While the judging as described in the parable is in the near future, even now something vital is taking place. We Christians are engaged in a lifesaving work of proclaiming a message that causes a division among people. (Matthew 10:32-39) Paul wrote: “For ‘everyone who calls on the name of Jehovah will be saved.’ However, how will they call on him in whom they have not put faith? How, in turn, will they put faith in him of whom they have not heard? How, in turn, will they hear without someone to preach?” (Romans 10:13, 14) Our public ministry is reaching people in over 230 lands with the name of God and his message of salvation. The anointed brothers of Christ are still spearheading this work. Some five million of the other sheep have now joined them. And people around the globe are responding to the message proclaimed by Jesus' brothers.

23 Many are exposed to our message as we preach from house to house or informally. Others may learn of Jehovah's Witnesses and what we represent in ways unknown to us. When judgment time arrives, to what extent will Jesus consider community responsibility and family merit? We cannot say, and it is pointless to speculate. (Compare 1 Corinthians 7:14.) Many now turn a deaf ear, ridicule, or share in outright persecution of God's people. Hence, this is a crucial time; such ones may be developing into those whom Jesus will judge as goats.—Matthew 10:22; John 15:20; 16:2, 3; Romans 2:5, 6.

24 Happily, though, many respond favorably, study God's Word, and become Witnesses of Jehovah. Some who at present seem goatlike may change and become like sheep. The point is that those responding and actively supporting the remnant of Christ's brothers are thereby now giving evidence that will provide a basis for them to be placed on Jesus' right hand when, in the near future, he sits down on his throne to render judgment. These are being and will continue to be blessed. Thus, this parable should spur us on to more zealous activity in the Christian ministry. Before it is too late, we want to do all we can to proclaim the good news of the Kingdom and in that way give others the opportunity to respond. Then it is up to Jesus to render judgment, condemnatory or favorable.—Matthew 25:46.

Watchtower Study
Week September 2 – September 8, 2013
“Tell Us, When Will These Things Be?”
Watchtower July 15, 2013
ENDNOTES

par. 12 Paragraph 12: See the parallel account at Luke 21:28.

Luke 21:28 But as these things start to occur, raise yourselves erect and lift YOUR heads up, because YOUR deliverance is getting near.”

par. 15 Paragraph 15: The words “coming” and “arriving” translate forms of the same Greek verb, er'kho-mai.

par. 18 Paragraph 18: As noted, the Greek word rendered “on arriving” at Matthew 24:46 is a form of the same Greek verb that is rendered “coming” at Matthew 24:30, 42, 44.

Matt. 24:46 Happy is that slave if his master on arriving finds him doing so.

Matt. 24:30 And then the sign of the Son of man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will beat themselves in lamentation, and they will see the Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.

Matt. 24:42 Keep on the watch, therefore, because YOU do not know on what day YOUR Lord is coming.

Matt. 24:44 On this account YOU too prove yourselves ready, because at an hour that YOU do not think to be it, the Son of man is coming.