

Biblical Ways to Respond to Signs of the Times—and Not Get Swept Up in Destructive Sensationalism

What's up with all of the end-of-the-world predictions from Christians? The latest in a long list of such predictions pointed to Sept. 23, 2017, as the end of the world as we know it. The so-called "Revelation 12" sign in the heavens was to signal the rapture of the church and drastic changes in the earth. It seems the man who is making the latest prediction, David Meade, is now pointing to Oct. 15 as the day.

A quick Google search will reveal that such predictions are not a recent development among believers. As early as the year 500, three theologians were predicting that was the year the world would end. One based his teaching on the dimensions of Noah's ark. But of course, they were wrong. Even the pope got involved in the prediction that the Lord would return in the year 1000. When He didn't come in 1000, a few Bible scholars said it would be 1033, 1,000 years after the crucifixion instead of His birth. Again, they were wrong!

The list is quite long, but a jump to the 19th century reveals that Jesus was predicted to return on Oct. 22, 1844, then in 1874, then in 1891. Predictions kept coming. Then in the 20th century, Edgar C. Whisenant, a NASA scientist and Bible teacher, predicted the Lord would return during Rosh Hashanah 1988. His book sold 4.5 million copies, and a major Christian network interrupted its regularly scheduled programming as the date approached to give people instructions on how to prepare for the rapture. When the Lord didn't return in 1988, Whisenant released a revised edition of his book, claiming it would be 1989. Then he predicted it would be 1993, then 1994.

Harold Camping got into the act in the 21st century, declaring that the rapture would happen on May 21, 2011, and the world would end in October of 2012. Those dates came and went, and the only thing that happened was many in the church had to eat crow. Predictions like this may sell books, garner hits on websites and go viral on social media, but they discredit the church. These predictions are also a direct disregard to the teaching of Jesus! In His own words, "But concerning that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Take heed, watch and pray. For you do not know when the time will come" (Mark 13:32-33).

The Christians who get caught up in speculation and sensationalism with solar eclipses, blood moons, natural disasters and political maneuvering and try to date the Second Coming lose credibility with their unsaved family members, friends, co-workers and neighbors. Eventually, they become like the boy who cried wolf one too many times—no one will listen to their message that Jesus is coming again. This brand of speculation and sensationalism results in many, even in the church, swinging the pendulum too far to the other side and becoming skeptical about the return of Christ.

Jesus is coming again. And happenings such as the blood moons, the recent solar eclipse, record-breaking hurricanes, typhoons, multiple earthquakes and even the so-called, "Revelation 12" movements with Virgo and Leo should not be ignored and quickly dismissed. Jesus said, "There will be signs in the sun and the moon and the stars; and on the earth distress of nations, with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring; men fainting from fear and expectation of what is coming on the inhabited earth. For the powers of heaven will be shaken. ... When these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads, for your redemption is drawing near" (Luke 21:25-26, 28). Scripture in many places points to signs that will indicate the closing of the last days and the beginning of the end times. And, though we cannot know the day or the

hour of His coming, the day will not overtake the church as a thief (1 Thess. 5:4).

Jesus taught us two valuable foundational principles that we must follow if we seek to navigate a sensible, biblical approach to these days. First, while we wait for His coming, we must watch. The word translated “watch” means *to be or keep awake, be alert, on guard, vigilant*. He encourages us to be able to read the signs of the time we live in—and remember, He always empowers our obedience (see Matt. 16:3). But He places a far greater emphasis on our keeping an eye on our spiritual condition than on the signs around us. Look at His word recorded in Luke 21:34, “Take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts become burdened by excessiveness and drunkenness and anxieties of life, and that Day comes on you unexpectedly.” (Luke 21:34). The reality is we cannot accurately discern the signs of the times if we are overcome by the issues of our everyday living. While we wait for His return we determine to watch—keeping awake and aware of the Holy Spirit’s working in our lives and in our generation.

The second foundational principle Jesus teaches regarding the end times is that while we wait, we work. We don’t pack our bags for the rapture and huddle with other fearful believers complaining about how bad things are getting! Jesus teaches that the faithful do His kingdom business until He returns (Luke 19:13). In fact, He said the end isn’t coming until, “This gospel of the kingdom will be preached throughout the world as a testimony to all nations...” (Matt. 24:14b). Like Jesus, we must work while it is day. The church is the expression of Jesus in the earth, and our world desperately needs to see Jesus these days. We are the salt of the earth! We are the light of the world! We are the city set on a hill that cannot be hidden (see Matt. 5:13, 14).

I don’t know exactly when, but I know He is coming. While we are waiting, let’s stay alert and watch and do His work of letting everybody in on the good news. They don’t have to

experience the wrath of God. Jesus took it! Today is the day to make ready for eternity. Even so, come quickly, Lord Jesus! {eoa}

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