

Is Your End-Times Theology a Hindrance to Revival?

I recently received an email from an individual who chided me for encouraging people to pray and believe God for another great spiritual awakening. He exhorted me that these are the last days and, therefore, no great revival will occur before the coming of the Lord. His gloomy, fatalistic eschatology (theology of the end) obviously left no room for God to work mightily in these days.

Sadly, this brother is like so many today whose doctrine of the end times precludes any hope of God visiting America, Europe and the world with another great spiritual awakening. This has happened because of an unhealthy preoccupation of the end that focuses exclusively on the evil that is predicted. Out of this has emerged a dark, fatalistic eschatology that is robbing the church of faith for revival in this generation.

Here are 5 reasons we can expect great revival in the last days, and why our eschatology must make room for such revival: (1) It was prophesied by Peter; (2) it was alluded to by Jesus; (3) my experience informs me it is so; (4) past revivalists considered great revivals to be part of the last days; (5) eschatology is very tenuous and should not be the basis for denying the possibility of revival in our day.

1. Predicted by Peter

A great worldwide outpouring of the Spirit of God in the last days is what Peter declared to the wondering crowd on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:17). As the disciples magnified God and praised him in other tongues, the onlooking multitude questioned what this could mean. Peter responded by quoting a prophecy from Joel about a universal outpouring of God's Spirit *on all flesh* (Joel 2:28-29).

“And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God, that I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters will prophesy, your young men shall see visions, your old men shall dream dreams, and on my menservants and my maidservants I will pour out of My Spirit in those days and they shall prophesy” (Acts 2:17-18).

In Jewish/rabbinic tradition, Joel’s prophecy was associated with the coming of the Messiah and the messianic age, also known as “the last days.” The messianic age would be a time when the Holy Spirit would no longer be confined to certain prophets, judges and kings in Israel, but would be universally poured out *on all flesh*.

Peter declared that with the coming of Jesus, the messianic age had dawned and the Spirit was now being poured out on all flesh. Peter further made his point by substituting Joel’s *it shall come to pass afterwards* with *it shall come to pass in the last days*. As far as Peter was concerned, the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus had ushered in the promised era. The *last days* had dawned and the Spirit of God was now being universally poured out without the former restrictions (Acts 2:14-18).

Is this not a solid biblical basis for praying in faith for a great spiritual awakening in our day?

2. Jesus Predicts Great Revival in the Last Days

In Matthew 24:14 Jesus declared, “And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come.” Interestingly, the Greek word translated “nations” in this passage is *ethnos*, from which we get “ethnic” and “ethnicity.” According to Wikipedia, the largest ethnic groups in modern times comprise hundreds of millions of individuals, with Han Chinese being the largest, while the smallest are limited to a few dozen individuals and include numerous indigenous peoples worldwide.

In other words, Jesus is not referring to modern nation states with geographical/political borders. He is referring to races and ethnicities that make up this planet. Just because a Christian broadcast in the English language goes into, let's say, India, does not mean that India has been reached with the gospel. India is made up of many ethnicities who speak many different languages.

When Jesus says that just before the *eschaton* the gospel will be preached as a witness to every ethnicity on planet earth, is this not a clear indication of a church that is alive and on the move? Is this not a church that has been awakened by the power of the Holy Spirit? Is this passage not a basis for the bold proclamation of the gospel and for praying that God will send another Great Awakening in our day?

3. My Own Experience

My own limited experience informs me that God is pouring out His Spirit all over the world and that we should be praying for great Spiritual awakenings. In 2006 Susan and I were invited to be part of the ministry team for the Azusa-Asia Celebration in Jakarta, Indonesia. Jakarta is the capital of the largest Muslim nation on earth. This was not an evangelistic crusade. This was Spirit-filled believers coming together to celebrate the 100-year anniversary of the worldwide Pentecostal revival and the 80-year anniversary of the Pentecostal revival in Indonesia. I had the privilege of addressing a very dynamic workshop packed with Spirit-filled believers as well as the 70,000 Spirit-filled believers in the soccer stadium, and hearing them rejoicing and praising God in their native tongues and in the language of the Spirit.

That same year Sue and I were in the Garo Hills of northeast India where I was the guest speaker for the very first convention of the Garo people, whose ancestors were headhunters. Even though far removed from America and

Indonesia, the same Spirit and presence of God was being poured out on those dear people who were so hungry to know Jesus. Underneath that bamboo tabernacle set on a dry rice paddy, God poured out His Spirit. Each time prayer was offered they would flock to the front, sometimes literally running and weeping and praying as they ran. Sometimes they would fall before they reached the front, often lying across one another as they cried out to God.

I have found the same to be true wherever God finds those whose hearts who are desperate for Him. It doesn't matter if it is Sweden, Ireland, England, Bulgaria, Canada or America. We are living in the time when God said He would pour out His Spirit on all flesh. Knowing this should encourage us to pray for revival as God instructed His people in Zechariah 10:1: "Ask the Lord for rain in the time of the latter rain. The Lord will make flashing clouds; He will give them showers of rain, grass in the field for everyone."

4. Past Revivalists Believed Revival to Be Part of the Last Days

Commenting on the reports of the Great Awakening in America wherein entire towns were repenting and turning to God, the well-known British hymn writer and theologian, Isaac Watts (1674-1748), linked what was happening to God's promises concerning the latter days. He wrote:

"Certainly it becomes us to give Him the glory which is due, when He begins to accomplish any of his promises concerning the latter days; and it gives us further encouragement to pray, and wait and hope for the like display of His power among us."

David Brainerd, who saw remarkable outpourings of the Holy Spirit among the American Indians of New Jersey and New England, linked the revival he saw to God's promises concerning the latter days. Even on his deathbed Brainerd

expressed hope for further great revivals in the end times. Dying of tuberculosis in the home of Jonathan Edwards at the tender age of 29, Brainerd expressed hope for revival and wondered that there was so little prayer for such a revival. Edwards wrote:

“After he came hither, and as long as he lived, he spoke much of the future prosperity of Zion which is so often foretold and promised in the Scriptures. It was a theme he delighted to dwell upon; and his mind seemed to be carried forth with earnest concern about it, and intense desires, that religion [Christianity] might speedily and abundantly revive and flourish. He seemed much to wonder that there appeared no more of a disposition in ministers and people to pray for the flourishing of religion [Christianity] through the world.”

Early Pentecostals also expected great revival even though they believed Christ's coming to be immanent. Their eschatology did not preclude revival but, in fact, made room for it and demanded it. They saw the end times through the prism of Acts 2:17 and interpreted all Scriptures about the *eschaton* in light of Peter's declaration of an outpouring of the Spirit on all flesh.

This is obvious in *The Apostolic Faith*, the official paper of the Azusa Street Revival published between 1906-08. These papers are filled with testimonies, and even prophecies, concerning the soon return of Christ. The same publication is also filled with expectations of great revival in the earth, and they saw themselves as the beginning of that revival. In fact, the Jan. 1, 1907, edition carried the headline, “Beginning of World Wide Revival.”

Somewhere along the way many Pentecostals, perhaps influenced by dispensationalist, evangelical theology, gave up the hope of great revival in the last days and replaced it with the gloomy fatalism that now dominates much of its eschatological thinking. It is time for Pentecostals to return to the faith

of their fathers and mothers and modify their eschatology to make room for great Spiritual awakenings in the last days.

5. End-Time Prophecy Is Tenuous

Since John wrote the book of Revelation, Christians have fallen into the trap of becoming distracted with speculations about the time of the end, the identity of the Antichrist, the number 666, etc., Writing in the latter part of the second century, the famous church father Irenaeus addressed the various theories that were being presented concerning the identity of the Antichrist and the possibility of him being alive at that time. He then cautioned about being overly confident about these matters and wrote:

“It is therefore more certain, and less hazardous, to await the fulfillment of the prophecy, than to making surmises, and casting about for any names that may present themselves, inasmuch as many names can be found containing the number [666] mentioned.”

If we had heeded Irenaeus’ warning and exercised more caution, we would have saved much embarrassment to ourselves and to the church through the centuries. Too many end-time prophecy teachers, in order to attract attention, thrive on such speculation and seek to link every tragic and sensational event, especially in the Middle East, to their theory of the end. Anyone who can convince the “folks” that they have unlocked the “secrets” of Daniel and Revelation will gain a following and a flow of income.

I have lived to see this happen again and again in my own lifetime. For example, as a young man I recall hearing preachers proclaim that the *times of the Gentiles* (Luke 21:24) were now over when Israel captured the old city of Jerusalem in 1967. Some went so far as to say that no more Gentiles would be saved because God was now turning to the Jews, and the rapture of the church would now happen at any time. During

this same time I heard a prophecy teacher prove that Henry Kissinger was the Antichrist by showing that the letters of his name, when transliterated into Greek, added up to the number 666. Hello Irenaeus! You warned us!

There were similar claims a few years later at the time of the Yom Kippur War in 1973. One “prophet” claimed that the seven-year tribulation had begun. In the 1980s there was the wildly popular book entitled *88 Reasons Jesus Will Come Back in 1988*. Some Christians were so duped that they had their pets put to sleep and some maxed out their credit cards thinking the debt would be left for the Antichrist.

Then there was Y2K with Christians storing up dried food and retreating to the mountains because, according to many prophecy teachers, the banking systems, electronic grids, government computer systems, etc. were all going to crash when the new century dawned on Jan. 1, 2000.

I have only scratched the surface here, but the point is that we need to hold our eschatology lightly and not be overly dogmatic about issues that are not clearly expressed in Scripture.

Concluding Thought: Major on the Majors

Such speculation about the end is a distraction from what is really important and a major hindrance to revival in our day. This was made clear by Jesus Himself when the disciples asked Him an eschatological question just before His ascension. Their question was: Will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel (Acts 1:7)? In His reply Jesus directed them away from speculations about the end to what was really important—the empowering of the Holy Spirit and worldwide evangelism. He said:

“It is not for you to know the times or seasons that the Father has put in His own authority. But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you and you shall be My

witnesses in Jerusalem, in Judaea, in Samaria and to the uttermost parts of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

As we anticipate His return, may we also pray and believe for Great Awakenings that will shake the nations with the word and power of God.

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