

Retired Pentecostal Pastor: Will Jesus Return in This Decade?

As we approach the end times and the fulfillment of last-days prophecies, we should look past the scoffers (2 Pet. 3:1-9) and instead look through the eyes of biblical prophets and see history in advance.

If we study biblical prophecy and the specific teachings of Christ and the apostles Paul, Peter and John, with reputable teachers of the Holy Scriptures (2 Tim. 3:14-17), we can learn of world empires rising and falling and of God's eternal kingdom that is coming. We will glimpse world politics and church-state intrigue. While we will sometimes wonder at the efforts of evil at work in the world, we can also rejoice as we see God's spiritual forces overruling world affairs with His righteousness.

Much of the time, when people think of biblical prophecy they are most concerned with the personal and practical implications of the "mystery" (a previously undisclosed truth or reality) of the "snatching away" or "gathering together" of the saints of God (living and dead) in what is popularly called the "rapture." Rather than worrying more about being "left behind," committed disciples can rest in this future hope and holy assurance.

This intriguing "blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:13, NKJV) also involves biblical insights on a great end-times apostasy among merely professing Christian believers and the persecution of true believers by the Antichrist during the predicted great tribulation (2 Thess. 2:1-4). This predicted time of intense struggle and martyrdom (Rev. 20:4) will be the wrath of Satan

(Rev. 12:9-12) and not the wrath of God (Rev. 14:7-10; 16:17-19), which is reserved for the unrepentant and blasphemers.

This terrible season of persecution against the elect of God seems to be shortened and terminated (Matt. 24:21-22) when Jesus comes in the clouds to rescue the true believers (1 Thess. 4:13-18). This gathering of believers from all the ages (1 Cor. 15:50-57) appears to occur *after* the great tribulation of those days and just *before* the coming of the Son of Man.

At that point, the wrath of God begins for the unbelievers who remain alive on the earth (Matt. 24:29-31) and culminates with our Lord's second coming to earth. As the Lord of lords and King of kings, He will righteously judge the nations (or ethnicities) (Matt. 25:31-46)!

In his Olivet Discourse, Jesus continued to warn the disciples that they could not know the day or the hour of His coming. (See Matthew 24:42, 44.) In the very next chapter, Jesus wrapped up His parable about the wise and the foolish virgins with this command: "Watch, therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming" (Matt. 25:13, MEV).

In view of the uncertain length of delay in Christ's coming for His own, we cannot be sure that this definite event will occur in our lifetimes – let alone in this decade.

The challenge given to us in these last days is to be constantly and eagerly watching and waiting for His return (1 Thess. 5:6-11). Scriptures say we need to be preparing ourselves to be pleasing to our heavenly bridegroom, as a bride without "spot or wrinkle" (Eph. 5:26-28, NKJV). We should focus on holy living (1 Thess. 4:1-8) and "hastening the coming of the day of God" (2 Pet. 3:8-12, NKJV), for we know that "our salvation is nearer than when we first believed" (Rom. 13:11-14, NKJV).

In these last days, let committed believers be about the Father's business (Luke 19:11-27) and not given to idle speculation or specific date-setting for our Lord's glorious return. Instead, may we live out our destinies (1 Pet. 2:9-10) and faithfully discharge our responsibilities (1 Pet. 4:7-11) so our Lord may say to us, as He did to the faithful servant in the parable of the talents, "Well done, good and faithful servant ... enter into the joy of your lord" (Matt. 25:21, 23, NKJV). {eoa}

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