

Why Jesus Could Come Back Sooner Than You Think

I was recently scanning the spines of some of the books on my shelves dealing with eschatology, the study of the end times or the last days. I happened on a 1997 book titled *The End* by Ed Dobson.

I didn't remember I had this book about predictive prophecy and pulled it out to scan and review for a few minutes. I discovered the front cover had a subtitle which "said it all":

"Why Jesus Could Return by A.D. 2000."

Now, two decades after the original publication date and nearly the same number of years past the turn-of-century target date, this projected timing of Christ's coming and the end of the world can be mocked (along with the other Y2K prognostications). However, these future realities cannot be ignored.

With the current bellicose threats from the demented dictator of North Korea and his provocative testing of long-range missiles, which could potentially be fixed with nuclear warheads and reach most countries of the Pacific Rim—including highly populated parts of the United States, the world may be closer to "the end" than ever before.

The predictions of the book's author may have been misdated ("by A.D. 2000") but his major propositions still attract our attention. Here they are:

1. The Bible predicts that Jesus Christ will come back to the earth and judge the lives of the living and the dead.
2. The Bible predicts the specific events and trends that will precede and accompany that coming of Christ.

3. The current situation in the world has remarkable parallels to the events and trends predicted in the Bible.

We humans seem to have an insatiable curiosity for knowing or sharing future and unusual events. Consequently, many are the gullible guests of charlatans preying on unsuspecting souls by dishing out the supposed truth or outright error in palatable portions. Additionally, we must recognize that some sincere but confused people are deliberately or demonically deceived.

Biblical prophecy is not like that. It is distinguished from the grocery store's tabloid-type predictions of the weird, bizarre and ridiculous. Instead, its predictions are not only reliable but claim to be divinely inspired (2 Pet. 1:20-21; 2 Tim. 3:16-17). And "natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Cor. 2:14-16). Only the spiritually alive can discern spiritual wisdom, for "we have the mind of Christ" (v. 16).

It is man's efforts to interpret or explain divine revelation in modern contexts or projected time periods which can lead us astray. Some well-intentioned interpreters get sidetracked with mystical, allegorical methods which take us away from the plain and simple teachings of Scripture. Also, some teachers have constructed analytical structures of "dispensations" and try to force prophetic Scriptures into these boxes of their own making.

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

If one studies biblical prophecy and the specific teachings of Christ, 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 coming kingdom. We will glimpse world politics and church-state intrigue. While we will, at times, 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" (Titus 2:13) involves biblical insights on a great end-times apostasy among merely professing 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.

This terrible season of persecution against the elect of God will 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 instantaneous transformation and gathering away of believers from all the ages will occur after the great tribulation of those days and as part of the triumphant 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, with His saints. As the Lord of lords and King of kings, He will righteously judge the nations (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 Matt. 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).

In view of the uncertain delay in Christ's coming, for His own, we might even say that we cannot be sure that it will even be in our lifetime. But the challenge given us is to be constantly and eagerly watching and waiting for His return.

The Bible says we need to be preparing ourselves to be pleasing to our heavenly bridegroom, as a bride without "spot or wrinkle" (Eph. 5:27). 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), for we know that "our salvation is nearer than when we first believed" (Rom. 13:11-14).

In these "last days," let us be about the Father's business (Luke 19:11-27) and not given to idle speculation or superstitious date-setting for our Lord's glorious return.

Instead, may we live out our destinies (1 Pet. 2:9-10) and faithfully discharge our spiritual duties (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, you good and faithful servant ... enter the joy of your Lord" (Matt. 25:21).