
BIBLE TALK

This week the question is: ***Is it possible to know when Jesus will return?***

A HISTORY LESSON

To begin our study of this question I want to tell you about an event which occurred in the year 1831. It was in that year that a preacher named William Miller began to preach about the second coming of Christ. According to his theories and calculations Jesus would return in 1843.

For ten years Miller preached his ideas and eventually amassed a following of about 50,000 followers (McClintock & Strong). When October 22, 1843 arrived, the followers of Miller walked away from their businesses and homes. Merchandise was left to be taken by anyone just walking in. After all, this was the day the world would end, what further need would there be for such goods? The faithful followers gathered in groups on hilltops. Many were dressed in white robes as if the Lord's disciples had to supply their own white robes (see Revelation 7:9). There they waited for the Lord to come again. The weather in New York that day was cloudy. Lightening was flashing across the sky. It appeared to the followers, "This is it. Surely the Lord returns today." Yet the Lord did not come. There was tremendous disappointment and loss.

Miller himself was disappointed, but persistent. An ordinary person might simply admit, "I was wrong," but not Miller. Rather, he studied more diligently his position and concluded there was an error in his calculations. Rather than 1843 being the correct year of the Lord's return, He would come again in 1844. This too would prove to be incorrect. Though Miller lost many of his followers, others were so convinced in his studies and prophetic-interpretations that they would continue his work and doctrines. From the William Miller debacle came two religious groups the Seventh Day Adventist Church and the Millennial Dawn Students (developing eventually into the Jehovah's Witnesses) (see: Wikipedia – Millerism). Both Adventists and Witnesses fixate on prophetic studies and view themselves as "experts" on prophecy.

In more recent days, men like Hal Lindsey (*The Great, Late Planet Earth*), Billy Graham (*Approaching Hoofbeats*), and Tim LaHaye (*Left Behind* series) have taken the same path Miller took. Most of these modern interpreters are careful not to name specific dates – Lindsey being the exception (see: Wikipedia – Planet Earth). The so-called "Jehovah's Witnesses" are also

famous for setting dates – and all the dates they have set have proven to be in error. All these modern-day prophecy-experts assure their followers the "end times" have arrived.

IS IT POSSIBLE TO KNOW?

Our question this week, then, is simply this: ***Is it possible to know when the Lord is going to return? Did the Lord give signs to watch for that would indicate to us when He would return?***

Matthew chapter 24 is often quoted to support the idea that there are certain signs that will appear before the second coming of Jesus. However, if you will read Matthew 24 very carefully, you will discover Jesus was giving His disciples signs to watch for that would indicate the city of Jerusalem was about to be destroyed by Roman armies. Listen carefully:

Matthew 24:1-3

¹ Then Jesus went out and departed from the temple, and His disciples came up to show Him the buildings of the temple.

² And Jesus said to them, "Do you not see all these things? Assuredly, I say to you, not one stone shall be left here upon another, that shall not be thrown down."

³ Now as He sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?"

Notice carefully, Jesus was showing His disciples that Jerusalem with its buildings and temple would be destroyed. Not "*one stone upon another*" would be left of this city when it would be destroyed.

Evidently the disciples thought only the end of the world could bring about such massive destruction, so they asked Jesus two questions in verse 3:

- When shall these things be?
- What shall be the sign of thy coming and the end of the world?

This first question about when Jerusalem would be destroyed Jesus answers in vv4-34, but the second question about the end of the world Jesus answered in vv36-51.

Although they were mistaken in believing that only the end of the world could destroy the city of Jerusalem, Jesus did give them signs to watch for that would signal Jerusalem's destruction. In vv4-14 Jesus gave some general signs to watch for. In vv15-28 He gave specific signs and in vv29-33 He used prophetic language to describe Jerusalem's destruction. Now, notice v34 carefully:

Matthew 24:34

³⁴ Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place.

Jesus verily plainly told His apostles that their generation would not pass before all of these events would be fulfilled! My friend, if they were all fulfilled during the generation, or lifetime of the apostles themselves, there is not one sign left that is unfulfilled today. All of these events took place in the year AD 70 when the army of Rome destroyed the city of Jerusalem under the orders of the Emperor of Rome!

Now, notice v36:

Matthew 24:36

³⁶ "But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only.

Do you see the point? When the disciples asked about His second coming to destroy the world, Jesus plainly said, "Of that day and hour" no man knows, not even the angels – only the Father. In fact, in Mk 13:32 Jesus said that He Himself did not even know when the world would end – only the Father knows!

The second coming of Jesus is likened to a thief who comes in the night without giving any warnings whatsoever (2 Pet 3:10). Life will be going on as usual – men will be eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage. There will be no warning at all when the Lord returns (Mt 24:38-39). Because we cannot know when the Lord will return to destroy the world, we are exhorted to always be ready:

Matthew 24:44

⁴⁴ Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.

My friend, Jesus may not come again for another thousand years, but then again, He *could* come again this very day. Not even the angels know when this will happen, so we must all live our lives as though it were our very last day on earth. If we would do this we would always be ready when the Lord actually does return.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Well ... thanks for listening to our message this week. We invite you to visit our website www.WillOfTheLord.com. There you may download the notes and the audio file of the message you just listened to.

Call again next week when we consider a new subject on ***Bible Talk***.