

Predicting Or Preparing For The End?

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Harold Camping is a radio preacher who predicted the so-called “rapture” of the church would happen yesterday (May 21, 2011) at 6 pm. The so-called “tribulation” would then allegedly extend to October 21st when the end of the world would happen. He and his supporters purchased expensive billboard and internet ads saying, “Judgment Day: May 21st. The Bible Guarantees It.”

If you’re reading this now, we now see Mr. Camping was completely wrong in this foolish prediction. In fact, he made a prior prediction that this would happen on October 28, 1992. He said afterward that he made a miscalculation somewhere. There are lessons to be learned from yesterday’s (non) events.

Jesus’ Return Date is Unknown and Unknowable. The Bible certainly guarantees that Judgment Day is coming with Christ’s return (John 5:28-29; 1 Thess. 4:13-17; Rev 20:11-15). Yet, the exact time is unknown and unpredictable. Note these clear Bible statements:

“Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away. But of that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone” (Mk 13:31-32). It is a grave error to claim to know something that Jesus Himself said He does not know.

“For you yourselves know full well that the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night” (1 Thess. 5:2ff; cf. Matt 24:43). A thief comes unannounced, at a time you expect it the least. So Jesus uses this illustration to clearly show that it is wrong to try and predict when He will return.

“You too, be ready; for the Son of Man is coming at an hour that you do not expect” (Luke 12:40).

Prepare for His Return, Not Speculate Upon it. Despite clear Bible teaching, men through time have foolishly speculated on trying to predict the end of the world. These are just a few examples of the many times men have tried to do so:

1284:

Pope Innocent III predicted Christ’s second coming would occur in this year. He based his prediction on the date of the inception of the Muslim faith, then added 666 years to that.

1524:

On Feb. 1st, Dr. H.L. Willmington noted that some 20,000 people abandoned their homes and fled to high ground in anticipation of a second great flood that was predicted to start from the Thames. This panic was due to predictions the world would soon end.

1844:

Baptist preacher William Miller predicted Jesus would return to upstate New York on October 22, 1844. Believers dressed in white robes and waited all day for Christ’s return. This became known in American history as the “Great Disappointment.”

1914:

Jehovah’s Witnesses have set several dates for the prophetic end: 1914, 1915, 1918, 1919, 1920, 1925, 1941, 1975, and 1994. In fact, 1975 saw many Jehovah’s Witnesses duped into selling their homes because they were deceived that the end would happen.

1988:

Hal Lindsay had predicted in *Late, Great Planet Earth* (1970) that Christ would return 40 years (one generation) after the 1948 establishment of the state of Israel (p. 58). In 1988, there was even a major book titled *88 Reasons Why Christ Will Return in 1988*. The following year he published *89 Reasons Why Christ Will Return in 1989*, claiming to have been slightly off on his calculations. Make that twice! I remember him rationalizing his error away by saying, “If it helps people get ready, then this is worthwhile.” No, twisting the Scriptures makes people in the world to mock the Bible as an unreliable guide and that Bible believers are dupes.

Rather, since the end of the world is unpredictable, Jesus says we should prepare to be ready to meet him: *“It is like a man away on a journey, who upon leaving his house and putting his slaves in charge, assigning to each one his task, also commanded the doorkeeper to stay on the alert. Therefore, be on the alert – for you do not know when the master of the house is coming, whether in the evening, at midnight, or...in the morning – in case he should come suddenly and find you asleep. What I say to you I say to all, ‘Be on the alert!’”* (Mark 13:33-37).

Jesus wants faithful obedience and spiritual sobriety, not idle speculation, which is an erroneous distraction. Neither should we have spiritual apathy about the time of His return. Are we alert and ready to meet Him?