



A Publication of CJF Ministries and Messianic Perspectives Radio Network

Messianic Perspectives[®]

God has not forgotten the Jewish people, and neither have we.

SEVEN THINGS EVERY CHRISTIAN SHOULD KNOW ABOUT THE END TIMES

BY DR. GARY HEDRICK

Charles Spurgeon, the far-famed 19th-century London pastor, was a passionate believer in the Second Coming. He preached about the “blessed hope” many times and affirmed it in no uncertain terms. On one occasion, however, he added a caveat: “This teaching [i.e., that the Lord is returning quickly] has given an opportunity to certain presumptuous people to prophesy that at such and such a time Christ will come. They know nothing about it, and their prophecies are not worth the breath they spent in uttering them.”¹

How true! Over the years, there have been plenty of wild predictions about the Lord’s return on such-and-such a date. In spite of all the silliness and wackiness in the “Rapture Alert” movement, however, the fact remains that the Lord did indeed promise that He would return someday. The Bible speaks loudly and clearly about that wonderful promise and its many ramifications. So, it behooves us to learn to sift out the fakery and the fabrications so we can see God’s truth on this important topic.

Terms in Traditional Jewish Eschatology

In Jewish sources like the Mishnah and Gemara (in the Talmud), where we have a record of endless debates on various topics between well-known rabbis, the meanings of prophetic terms are sometimes ambiguous, overlapping, or confusing. The NT puts the pieces of the end-time puzzle together with much greater clarity; but, here are the basic concepts from ancient Jewish texts:

1. **Olam HaZeh**—“this (present) age/world”
2. **Olam HaBa**—“the age/world to come”
3. **Acharit HaYamim**—“the last (or final) days” before the end of the age
4. **Yemot HaMashiach**—“days of the Messiah”; i.e., when He arrives
5. **Qetz HaYamin**—“end of days” (found in Daniel 12:13), similar in meaning to #3 above
6. **Techiyat HaMeitim**—a general and undifferentiated “resurrection of the dead” at the end of time
7. **Sechar**—present and/or future “reward” for the righteous

Toward that end, here are seven things you need to know about the end of this world and the beginning of the next one.

1. We’ve been living in “the last days” for the past 2,000 years.

When we hear the term “Eschaton” (lit., “last [times]”), most of us think of the period immediately prior to the Lord’s return—the proverbial “end of the world.”² However, the Eschaton is much more than that. It marks the beginning of a countdown that started when the Messiah was born some 2,000 years ago and will conclude when He sits on the throne of David in Jerusalem.

How do we know this? Well, in the first century, the writer of Hebrews declared, “[God] has IN THESE LAST DAYS spoken to us by [His] Son” (1:2, emphasis added). So, this first-century writer believed he was living in the “last days.” Another New Testament (NT) writer likewise affirmed, *[The Messiah] indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest IN THESE LAST TIMES for you* (1 Peter 1:20, emphasis added).

The Apostle Paul was even more specific. In one of his prophetic teachings, he said, “WE who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord” (1 Thess. 4:15, emphasis added). Note: he said, “we who,” not “those who.” So, Paul not only accepted the general notion that he was living in the last days, but he specifically said he was hopeful that he would be alive when the Lord returned.

As it turns out, it has always been God’s intention that each generation of believers would have the hope and expectancy that His Son might return during their lifetime. Can you imagine what a downer it would have been if the angels (after the Ascension in Acts 1:10-11) had said, “Okay, guys, you’d better hunker down for the long haul because He’s not coming back for a really long time—thousands of years, in fact!” How disheartening that would have been!

So, the question is: was it a real hope? Or was it just wishful thinking for most of the last 2,000 years? I personally believe it has always been a real hope. I don’t pretend to have all the answers; but, I do know that in theology, there’s often tension between the *actual* and the *theoretical*. In actuality, as history has unfolded over the past two millennia, we know (in retrospect) that Yeshua hasn’t returned yet. But, theoretically, as history progressed, He could have returned at any point from the first century on.³ In fact, the Jewish people (*Am Yisra’el*) could have accepted Him as Messiah right after the Resurrection, and at least in theory, the Millennial reign would have begun shortly thereafter.⁴ The time-gap in the Daniel 9 prophecy allows for this because the length of the gap is indeterminate.⁵ His own disciples evidently thought that even while He was still with them, He might be getting ready to reinstate the promised Kingdom to Israel (Acts 1:6-7).

Messianic Perspectives®

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Messianic Perspectives is published bimonthly by CJF Ministries, P.O. Box 345, San Antonio, Texas 78292-0345, a 501(c)3 Texas nonprofit corporation: Dr. Charles Halff (1929-2000), Founder; Dr. Gary Hedrick, President; Brian Nowotny, Vice President for Administration; Erastos Leiloglou, Creative Director. Subscription price: \$10 per year. The publication of articles by other authors does not necessarily imply full agreement with all the views expressed therein. Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are taken from the New King James Version of the Bible (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982). Visit us online at cjfm.org. Toll-free OrderLine: (800) 926-5397. © 2018 by CJF Ministries. All rights reserved.

Maybe this is why the timing of the Lord's return has been such a closely-held secret, even in the internal deliberations of the Godhead.⁶ The Bible tells us that Yeshua himself doesn't know when the Father will release Him to return to earth: *But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father* (Mark 13:32).⁷ The angels don't know, either; and, they are no doubt just as anxious for it to take place as we are.

In the midst of the differing theories, the imaginative speculation, and the hopeful wondering, what can we know for sure? Simply this: the "last days," by definition,

won't continue indefinitely. There will be a terminus. No one should assume that because the Lord has put off His return for roughly 2,000 years, He has forgotten about us and abandoned His plan. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Remember that God's time-scale isn't as tiny and limited as ours. He is the uncreated, eternal First Cause of everything; so, to Him, a day can be like a thousand years and a thousand years like a day (2 Peter 3:8). Even though it looks to us like He's been delayed for 2,000 years, on God's time-scale it's only been a couple of days!

Does God Ever Delay His Plans?

Nobody likes delays. If we order a taxi, we want it to arrive on time. If we're waiting to board a plane, we want it to be on schedule. Or, if we're in line to be seated in a restaurant, there's a limit to how long we'll linger in the lobby.

We may not like it, but there are indications in Scripture that God is perfectly able to delay His plans when it suits Him and when it serves His purposes. When He does so, it doesn't make Him any less powerful or any less all-knowing. After all, nothing ever takes Him by surprise because His existence is eternal and non-linear, unlike we humans who are time-bound and experience life as a finite sequence of days, months, and years. God sees everything happening at the same time and He can intervene anywhere or at any time He chooses.

In Revelation 10, for example, we read: *The angel whom I saw standing on the sea and on the land raised up his hand to heaven and swore by Him who lives forever and ever, who created heaven and the things that are in it, the earth and the things that are in it, and the sea and the things that are in it, THAT THERE SHOULD BE DELAY NO LONGER* (vv. 5-6, emphasis added; see also Hab. 2:2-3).

So, even in the Book of Revelation, where God's plan for the last days unfolds so graphically and methodically, there are evidently delays along the way as the scenario plays out. This passage clearly says a delay has come to an end.

Likewise, the "postponement theory" posits a plausible delay in the Lord's return due to Israel's continuing unbelief. If the Jewish nation had received Yeshua as Messiah in the weeks, months, or years following His Resurrection, the Messianic Kingdom, at least theoretically, could have started in the first century. Since the Sanhedrin never reversed its decision (made prior to the Crucifixion) to reject and condemn Him (Matt. 26:63-66), that decision continued to be in effect after the Resurrection, even though thousands of Jewish people in Jerusalem were coming to faith by that time, including many of the Temple priests (Acts 6:7).

Some people misunderstand the meaning of God's sovereignty. It doesn't mean He can't (or won't) adjust the timing as His plans unfold down here on the earthly timeline. What it means is that He can make any changes He wishes without it altering the ultimate outcome.

Still, we don't like delays, especially those we find inconvenient or troublesome. With respect to the Lord's return, we want Him to come now! That's perfectly understandable—and it's as it should be.

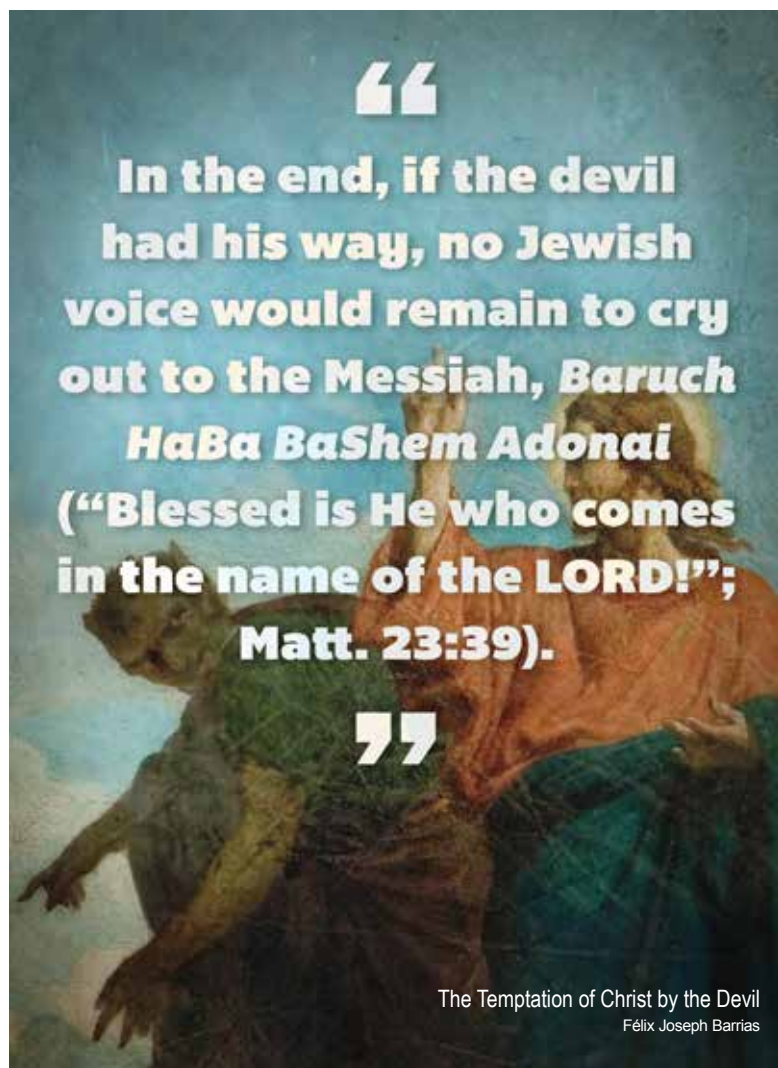
When God delays, however, we should trust that He knows what He's doing and that the delay (which, by the way, is only a "delay" from our time-bound, earthly perspective) is necessary for our good and for the furtherance of His purposes.

"But while the bridegroom was delayed, they all slumbered and slept. And at midnight a cry was heard: 'Behold, the bridegroom is coming; go out to meet him!'" (Matt. 25:5-6).

2. Satanic activity will accelerate as we near the end of this age.

The Bible teaches that the devil is real. He's not just a metaphor or a cartoon character with horns and a red tail. He's a diabolical Superintelligence who's obsessed with trying to thwart God's plans.

The Book of Revelation tracks the evil one's final years as his misery-spreading career comes to its ignominious end. Near the mid-point of the book (Chapters 12, 13, and 14), there's a series of seven signs. These signs (KJV, "wonders") appear to be associated with the second half of the Tribulation—the last three and a half years of the Time of Jacob's Trouble.⁸ John says he hears a loud voice declaring, *"Therefore rejoice, O heavens, and you who dwell in them! Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and the sea! For the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, because he knows that he has a short time"* (Rev. 12:12).



The devil, then, has a keen sense of timing when it comes to the progression of prophetic events. He has a strategy for usurping God's position as supreme potentate of the universe and near the end, he'll know he only has a brief window of time in which to try to pull it off. The Prophet Isaiah saw what was in Lucifer's heart: *"For you [i.e., Lucifer] have said in your heart: I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will also sit on the mount of the congregation On the farthest sides of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High"* (Isa. 14:13-14; see also Ezek. 28:11-15).⁹

During the coming Tribulation Period, an important part of the devil's strategy will be to focus on the destruction of the people of Israel (*Am Yisrael*). He knows that such a turn of events would bring about the dissolution of God's irrevocable promises to the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—and he's right about that. In the end, if the devil had his way, no Jewish voice would remain to cry out to the Messiah, *Baruch HaBa BaShem Adonai* ("Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD"; Matt. 23:39). (See point number three below.)

This, then, is Satan's blueprint for victory. He tells himself, *destroy the People of God and you will have effectively dethroned God*. And, if the devil will have this sense of urgency during the Tribulation, when he realizes his time has almost expired, how about today? Surely, he realizes his precarious predicament even now. The clock is ticking. Time is running out. He will be taking his last stand during the future Tribulation. It will be "do or die" for him.

In 2 Thessalonians 2, the Apostle Paul outlines a series of prophetic events that will take place in connection with the coming Tribulation Period:

- a. A great apostasy (i.e., "falling away") will take place (v. 3a).¹⁰
- b. The "man of sin" (another name for the Antichrist) will be revealed (v. 3b).
 - (1) He will be a "son of perdition" (v. 3c).
 - (2) He will oppose God (v. 4a).
 - (3) He will exalt himself and demand worship (v. 4b).
 - (4) He will "sit as God" in the rebuilt Jerusalem Temple (v. 4c).
 - (5) He will promote "the mystery of lawlessness" (vv. 7-8).¹¹
- c. The Restrainer (i.e., the Holy Spirit) will make sure the Man of Sin isn't revealed until his appointed time (v. 6).¹²
- d. The Restrainer will be "taken out of the way" at the Rapture (v. 7).¹³
- e. The Man of Sin/Lawless One is destined to be destroyed by the Lord (v. 8).
 - (1) But first, he will be energized by Satan (v. 9a).
 - (2) He will deceive many with "power, signs, and lying wonders" during the Tribulation (v. 9b).
 - (3) God will use the "delusion" of Antichrist's followers against them (vv. 10-11).¹⁴

So, even though the "last days" have continued for two millennia, no one should assume that they will go on indefinitely. They won't! Many of us believe that even now, we are seeing Paul's "mystery of lawlessness" in its early stages. Especially here in the West, laissez-faire living is the order of the day. People are throwing off every possible biblical restraint. Behavior that would have been scandalous (or even criminal) in previous generations has become normalized. Taking its cue from the #nevertrump movement, the hashtag #nevergod has recently sprung up on Twitter as it becomes more acceptable on social media to mock God and His laws.

So, it looks like things are winding down, and they're going to get worse before they get better! The challenges looming on the horizon will weed out those in our ranks who are just playing church. At the same time, however, we should be encouraged by the fact that the intensification of Satanic activity is, in conjunction with other predictive indicators, a sign that the end is approaching: *"Now when these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near"* (Luke 21:28).

THE SECOND COMING WILL OCCUR IN TWO PHASES



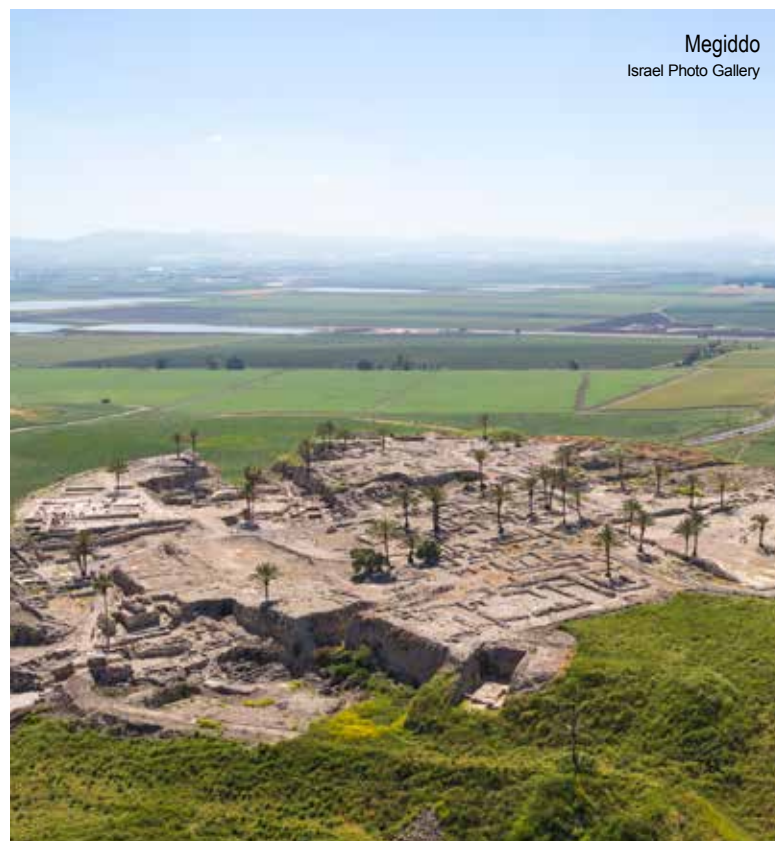
3. The trigger for the second phase of the Second Coming (i.e., the coming in glory at the end of the Tribulation) will be Israel's confession of Yeshua.¹⁵

All forms of evangelism are important because people everywhere, whoever they are, need the Lord. However, Jewish evangelism is the only form of outreach that's directly linked to Yeshua's return. When His People Israel repent and cry out, "*Baruch HaBa BaShem Adonai!*", the Bible says He will return and rescue them (Matt. 23:37-39). In English, this Messianic affirmation is, "Blessed is He Who comes in the name of the LORD." It's from the *Hallel* Psalms (115-118) that are recited in connection with Passover in the Jewish faith (both Messianic and traditional).

Someone may wonder, "If the *Hallel* (i.e., the Messianic affirmation) is all that's required, then why didn't Yeshua accept the kingly mantle when He entered Jerusalem in the first century?" Good question! After all, they were crying out, "*Baruch HaBa BaShem Adonai,*" weren't they (Matt. 21:9)? What makes the future *Hallel* different from the one 2,000 years ago? Well, the difference is that in the first century, the Messianic affirmation by the people in the streets was negated with the Messianic rejection by the nation's governing body, the Sanhedrin (26:57-67). On that sad and momentous occasion, the High Priest of Israel asked Yeshua if He was the Messiah. When the Lord replied in the affirmative, the High Priest ripped his garments and declared that He was guilty of blasphemy. They then condemned Yeshua to death (v. 66). But, the future *Hallel* will be accompanied only by affirmation and acceptance. There will be no rejection.

If we're putting the pieces of the prophetic puzzle together correctly, Israel's change of heart will happen at the climax of the Armageddon Campaign (Rev. 16:16). It will be near the end of the future Tribulation, when the armies of many nations have invaded the region, intending to launch a massive military strike from a staging area at Megiddo in the Jezreel Valley. As this multinational force is preparing to pounce on Jerusalem, the Jewish capital (Zech. 14:2), Gospel "seeds" that have been planted in Jewish hearts all over the world (including in Israel) will begin to germinate and one by one, in a very short period of time, the vast majority of Jewish Israelis who are living at the that time will come to faith in Yeshua.¹⁶

It's also notable, especially in light of Israel's precarious future predicament at Armageddon, that yet another Messianic affirmation is *Hosanna*, which in Hebrew means "save now" (Psalm 118:26; see also John 12:13). Sometimes we sing "hosanna" in the lyrics of a song without really knowing what it means. It's a cry of desperation, with a sense of urgency. So, on that future day when the Israelis cry out *Hosanna*—"Save Now!"—it will be more than just a word. It will be a heartfelt plea for their King-Deliverer (i.e., the Messiah) to save them from impending destruction at Armageddon. And what's more, His Hebrew/Aramaic name (Yeshua) means "salvation"!

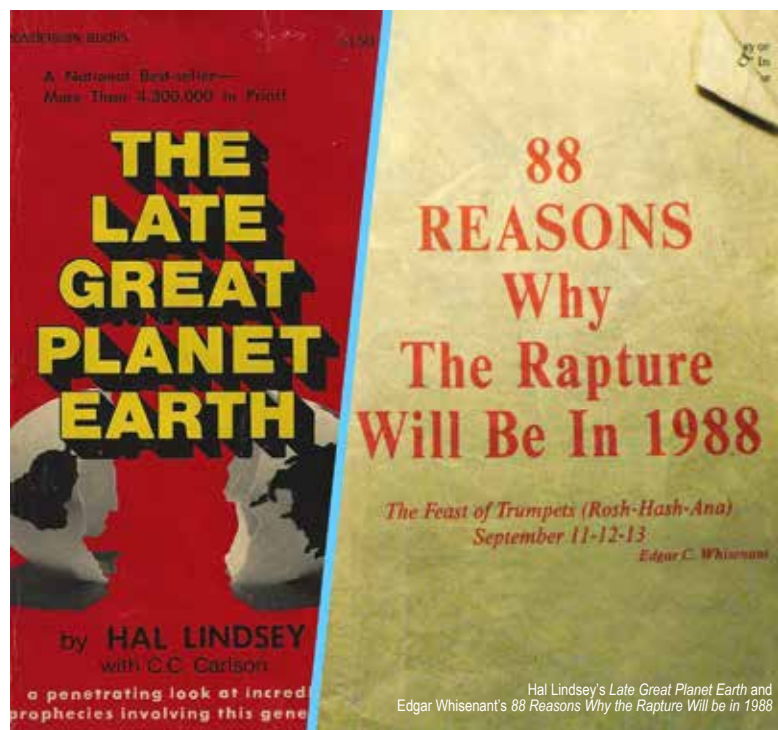


This is why it's so crucial that we continue sowing Gospel seeds in Jewish hearts all over the world, and especially in Israel. Someday we'll reap a harvest unlike any the world has ever seen!

4. No one knows the day or the hour (or even the year) of the Lord's return.

Date-setting and other forms of prophetic sensationalism are nothing new. Even going back to the first century and before, the religious world has been continually plagued by kooks, deceivers, and devious profiteers.

And, we continue to see it today. In fact, “Rapture fatigue” is a new buzzword in the evangelical world. It’s used to describe a decline in prophetic zeal on the part of many believers today. They yawn and say, “Jesus is coming? Oh, yeah, I’ve heard that before.”

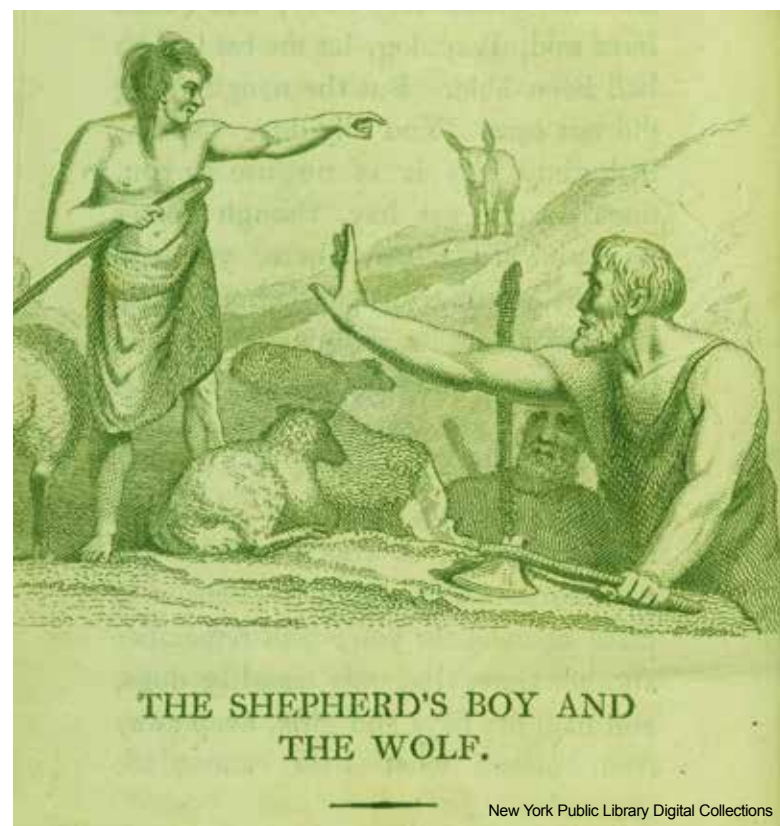


We’ve seen many silly and misguided predictions about the Lord’s return over the past 50 years or so, and this prophetic alarmism has taken a toll on the Church. One poor guy, Josiah Hesse, told *The Guardian* newspaper (in the UK) that he was “raised under the dark bubble of fundamentalism” and “recalls a childhood filled with gloom, doom, and preparing for the end of the world.” In the 1990s, his family was part of a fundamentalist survivalist movement that viewed Y2K (i.e., the rollover from 1999 to 2000) as an approaching apocalyptic meltdown. As a child, Josiah lived in constant fear and suffered from recurring nightmares.¹⁷

And, Hesse isn’t alone. Prophetic alarmism came swiftly on the heels of the publication of Hal Lindsey’s *Late Great Planet Earth* in 1970—and it spread quickly in the religious world. The Lindsey book became an overnight best-seller and other writers (like Salem Kirban and Jack Van Impe) quickly identified a prophetic niche in the religious publishing market.¹⁸ Some of the teaching wasn’t too bad; but much of it was misguided and bogus, with some writers even setting dates or years for the Rapture and identifying the Antichrist by name (Henry Kissinger, Mikhail Gorbachev, and King Juan Carlos of Spain took turns as the leading candidates). By the late 1980s, the Christian community was being force-fed a steady diet of date-setting silliness like Edgar Whisenant’s *88 Reasons Why the Rapture Will Be in 1988*. Whisenant, a retired NASA scientist, was dogmatic about his theory and stated, “Only if the Bible is in error am I wrong.”¹⁹

Just last year, some “Rapture Alert” people were saying that an astronomical alignment on September 23, 2017, would bring the Rapture of the Church on (or around) that date. They called it the “Revelation 12 Sign” because it was supposedly based on the first two verses of Revelation 12, where John says, *Now a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a garland of twelve stars* (v. 1). This theory was rigorously debunked (from both Scripture and also from astronomy) by no less an authority than Christian astronomer Danny Faulkner, PhD; but the “twelve signers” weren’t paying attention.²⁰ They fell for it hook, line, and sinker. Even after the date passed, they thought maybe their calculations were slightly off. By now, a year later, most of them have given up and moved on to other dates.²¹

It’s ironic that the date-setters are the ones who are now complaining the loudest about the precipitous decline in prophetic interest—presumably because sales of their books and CDs isn’t as brisk as it once was. The irony is that they themselves are largely responsible for the current epidemic of prophetic apathy! It’s like the proverbial boy who sounded the alarm and cried “Wolf!” so many times that no one would believe him when a real wolf showed up. Similarly, people in our churches have heard the Rapture alarm sounded so many times, some of them no longer take it seriously—hence, the term “Rapture fatigue.” And who can blame them?



What is most regrettable about all of this is that it distracts people from (and numbs them to) the reality that *the Lord will return someday*. He really will—we have His Word on it: *And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also* (John 14:3).

Someday, the prophetic profiteers, fearmongers, and sensationalist snake oil salesmen (and women) will answer to God for the damage they’ve done with their irresponsible handling of His prophetic Word.

5. The Rapture is biblical, but specific details about its timing aren't worth fighting over.

Learning to read the Bible from a Messianic (Jewish-Christian) perspective can open up new vistas of biblical understanding. This doesn't mean that a non-Jewish person can't properly interpret the Bible; it just means that understanding some of the basics of Jewish culture, language, and beliefs can make it a little easier.

After all, the Bible (including the NT!) was written by Jewish men from Jewish families who lived in Israel, spoke Hebrew/Aramaic, worshiped in the Temple, and lived their lives immersed in the first-century Israelite culture. So, the better we can understand them (i.e., the Jewish writers of Scripture), the better we'll understand what they wrote (in the Scriptures).

This is especially true when we're studying prophecy. Why? Because over and over again, the true Church (i.e., the *Ekklesia*, the called-out community of believers) is referred to as a "bride" (John 3:29; Rev. 21:2, 9; 22:17) who's been chosen by the Father to be wedded to His Son (Matt. 22:3-12; 25:10). Their wedding guests are called to a "marriage supper" (19:9). So, we're the Bride and Yeshua is the Groom, and it's a Jewish ceremony. Once we understand these basics, we're going to want to find out everything we can about ancient Jewish wedding customs to see what they teach us about our betrothal to Yeshua, our Bridegroom!

We believe the parallels between first-century Jewish wedding customs and our coming "marriage" to Yeshua strongly suggest a premillennial and pretribulational timeline (see chart on page 5). That is, the Church will be "raptured" (i.e., caught up) before the seven-year Tribulation, which, in turn, will be followed by Messiah's Kingdom. However, other sincere believers have slightly different timelines. Some of them say, for example, that the Rapture happens at the middle or end of the Tribulation. Our founder, Charles Halff, used to admonish us not to fight over these details because "no matter which view we hold, we're all within seven years of each other."²² Great advice!

6. Keep an eye on Western cultural disintegration.

The Christian West²³ is rapidly falling apart before our very eyes.²⁴ Biblical beliefs and values are being mocked and ridiculed publicly. The building block of our civilization, the traditional family unit, is being unraveled and redefined. *Omnes intenciones et proposita* (for all intents and purposes), the meaning of the term "family" is now fluid and can be whatever anyone wants it to be. Christians and other political conservatives can't even speak at secular universities (those bastions of tolerance and diversity!) without being harassed and threatened. Hordes of 20-something spoiled brats, often egged on by anti-God political action groups, have been allowed to let off steam at public universities by looting and pillaging businesses while police stand idly by.²⁵ Spiritually, morally, and economically, our culture is bankrupt. Even worse, it is progressively losing the will to defend itself.



While this decline is disheartening to many people of faith, it's shouldn't take us by surprise. After all, this is precisely the type of world scene the Bible describes as the backdrop for Antichrist's rise to power. A crumbling civilization, wheezing and gasping for every breath, will be ripe for "rescue" at the hands of a compelling, charismatic political figure. When that day comes, he will offer solutions to the spirit of lawlessness and anarchy that has gripped the world. Eventually, the result will be a virtual global police state under his control.

When this arrogant megalomaniac stands in the Jerusalem Temple someday and insists on being worshiped (Rev. 13:8-13), it won't be simply a hollow boast or egotistical taunt. As far as this "beast" is concerned, he will be single-handedly pulling an entire civilization (including Israel) back from the precipice of certain destruction.²⁶ What could be more god-like than that? Wall Street will love him. The United Nations will adore him. World leaders in Washington, Brussels, Beijing, New Delhi, and Moscow will be stumbling over each other to sign up. Dissent will not be tolerated. New "Babylon" will rise, just like John predicted (Rev. 18).²⁷

Where There's a Will, There's a Way

We understand, as you do, that while we're here, there are no shortages of needs that take our time and resources. And though our intention is to remember the Lord's work with a financial gift someday, more immediate needs divert our attention. To our regret, that day of remembrance never comes, which is why including CJF Ministries in your will is an excellent way—without disturbing your current priorities—to ensure that your hard-earned assets will continue supporting the Lord's work even after you're gone. If you've never considered such a method of assisting, we'd be most grateful if you'd make it a matter of prayer. Should you require additional information, we'd be happy to provide helpful instructions.

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10 SIGNS THE TRIBULATION IS NEAR

—Adapted from DavidJeremiah.org

- | | |
|--|---|
| <p>1 DECEPTION
Many will say "I am the Christ" (Matt 24:5)</p> <p>2 DISSENTION
Wars (Matt 24:6-7)</p> <p>3 DEVASTATION
Famines (Matt 24:7)</p> <p>4 DISEASE
Pestilences (Matt 24:7)</p> <p>5 DISASTERS
Earthquakes (Matt 24:7)</p> | <p>6 DEATH
Hated for my name's sake (Matt 24:9)</p> <p>7 DISLOYALTY
Betray, hate one another (Matt 24:10)</p> <p>8 DELUSION
False prophets (Matt 24:11)</p> <p>9 DEFECTION
Turn away from God & each other (Matt 24:12)</p> <p>10 DECLARATION
Gospel preached in all the world (Matt 24:14)</p> |
|--|---|

We're not date-setters; and it can become downright silly sometimes when misguided believers try to turn virtually every current event into some type of prophetic fulfillment. However, social and political trends can sometimes provide a meaningful prophetic benchmark to help us discern legitimate, developing "signs of the times" (Matt. 16:3). This leads us to our final point.

7. Watch for a convergence of prophetic indicators.

Every time there's a major earthquake, epidemic, war, tropical storm, solar flare EMP, eclipse, astronomical alignment, or other unusual natural phenomenon, the "Rapture alert" networks swing into action and start cranking out their alarmist propaganda. Some of them have learned the value of plausible deniability; so, they use conditional wording like "may be," "could be," or "might be," just in case the proposed date or event comes and goes uneventfully. Then, they can come back later and say, "Well, we never said it was a sure thing."

In Matthew 24, the Lord enumerates a litany of prophetic signs that will indicate the approach of the end of the age—things like warfare, earthquakes, famines, pestilence, the rise of deceptive religious leaders ("false prophets"), persecution and martyrdom of believers, and lawlessness (i.e., widespread rejection of legitimate authority), among others (vv. 1-15).²⁸

However, no single one of these developments, by itself, signifies the end. Even two or three of them happening

simultaneously isn't a true, biblical sign. It's only when believers during the Tribulation²⁹ see "all these things" happening at the same time, with a measurable upsurge in frequency and intensity (like birth pains), that those things cumulatively become signs of the end: "So you also, when you see *ALL THESE THINGS*, know that it is near—at the door" (v. 33, emphasis added).³⁰

We can be watchful and hopeful about the Lord's return without getting caught up in date-setting and pseudo-prophetic opportunism and alarmism.

For believers, the Lord's return is good news, not bad news. We should remember that. If there's anything this old world needs right now, it's hope and optimism about the future! And, while He leaves us here, let's be faithful in serving Yeshua, telling others about Him, and always looking forward to "the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior [Yeshua the Messiah]" (Titus 2:13).



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JOURNEY TO THE HOLY LAND OF ISRAEL

FEBRUARY 28–MARCH 10, 2019

Explore the beauty and the biblical significance of the Sea of Galilee, the Mediterranean Sea, and the Dead Sea. You will also get to experience Israel from a Messianic perspective as you travel to Jerusalem, Masada, the Valley of Megiddo, and Galilee to mention a few.

¹ *The Spurgeon Study Bible* (Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017), footnote on p. 1618.

² “The end of the world” is an unnecessarily dark and gloomy way of characterizing the Lord’s return. While it’s true that the Second Coming marks the end of the current age, it also marks the beginning of a new one—that is, the reign of Messiah Yeshua over Israel and the whole world. In that sense, then, the Eschaton (lit., “last [times]”) means the old world order is coming to an end and a new and wonderful world is on the horizon.

³ Many of our dispensationalist friends would amend this statement to say, “He could have returned at any point in history since the first century *when a sovereign State of Israel was in existence*,” which would disqualify the period from AD 70 to 1948. This proposed scenario is often associated with the so-called “postponement theory,” which isn’t taken seriously for the most part in mainstream theological circles. In fact, some critics consider it outright heresy and accuse its premillennialist proponents of preaching “another Jesus” and “another gospel” (see “Andy Woods on the Postponement Theory” by the late Doug Cox at creationconcept.wordpress.com). However, the postponement theory isn’t as easily dismissed as its critics think. The word “postponement” has a negative connotation because it sounds as though God had to change His plans due to human failure; however, the truth is that God has known all along how the entire scenario would play out. He knew it even before He created the world. To satisfy His own sense of justice and fairness, however, He intentionally allowed for the theoretical possibility that Israel might receive her Messiah at some point on the prophetic timeline before now. Part of the difficulty here is our inability to comprehend God’s non-linear way of deciding how to respond to people, nations, and events. He’s able to process the past, present, and future as though it’s all happening at the same time; but, that’s not how our finite, human minds work.

⁴ In fact, this seems to have been the disciples’ expectation in Acts 1:6.

⁵ We know there’s a gap between the 69th and 70th weeks in Daniel 9 because the Messiah couldn’t appear AFTER the 69th “week” but not IN the 70th “week” unless there was a time-gap between the 69th and 70th “weeks.” I won’t push this speculative line of reasoning (about the Messiah establishing the Kingdom shortly after His Resurrection) too far because it does have limitations. For instance, what about the many prophecies about the seven-year Tribulation ending with Armageddon? When would they have been fulfilled if the Millennium had started a few days or weeks after the Resurrection in AD 30? And, as we mentioned in a previous endnote, with respect to a potential Second Coming in, say, AD 800 or 1500, wouldn’t a State of Israel need to exist in order for the Sanhedrin officially to receive the Messiah? For these reasons, as well as others, it’s better to keep a lid on the speculation (even though imaginative scenarios could be proposed to satisfy those problems) and maintain our focus on the proposition that every generation of believers since the first century has had a legitimate “blessed hope” that the Lord might return during their lifetime. God arranged it this way by design. *Theoretically*, then, it has been a real hope even though in *actuality* God has always known when Israel would finally get around to meeting the Messianic requirement for Yeshua’s return (Matt. 23:37-39).

⁶ “Godhead” (Rom. 1:20; Gal. 2:9) is another term for the Tri-unity. The term Tri-unity (or Trinity; lit., “three [in] one”) is a Messianic variant of the traditional, contracted term “Trinity.” The importance of the term Tri-unity is that it allows for both concepts—singularity and multiplicity (like, one cluster but many grapes [Num. 13:23]). Although the *term* itself is manmade and never appears in Scripture, the *teaching* is clearly and unmistakably there.

⁷ Some scholars believe that Yeshua only lacked this knowledge when He was here on earth during the “humiliation” (or “emptying”) that He experienced in His Incarnation (i.e., the process of becoming a flesh-and-blood Man); and now that He’s enthroned in Heaven again, they would say He probably knows the day and hour of His return.

⁸ Although the general structure of Revelation is arranged chronologically (“things which you have seen [in the past], and the things which are [in John’s present], and the things that will take place after this [in the future]” 1:19), various parenthetical passages are inserted here and there for explanatory purposes. (One example is where John concludes the prophetic timeline at the end of Chapter 20 before appending Chapters 21 and 22 to provide more details about the events covered in Chapter 20.)

⁹ Both Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28 refer in their immediate context to earthly kings; however, many theologians see a “double reference” in each of these passages because certain facts and characteristics are ascribed to these kings that couldn’t have applied to any historic, earthly king. Some interpreters parse things a little differently, acknowledging a double reference in Ezekiel 28 but not in Isaiah 14 (see “Downfall of Power behind King of Tyre” in *The Moody Bible Commentary* on Ezekiel 28; 1245).

¹⁰ The Greek word that’s translated “apostasy” here comes from a root signifying divorce—that is, two things were together but have moved apart. One has rebelled, in some sense, against the other. In the last days, then, there will be a polarization in society in which the good will get better and the bad will get worse. This cosmic conflict will pit light against darkness, truth against error, right against wrong, and righteousness against evil on an unprecedented scale.

¹¹ The NIV translates the opening phrase of 2 Thessalonians 2:7 like this: *For the secret power of lawlessness is already at work.* The Greek word for “secret power” is *musterion* (μυστήριον), which is translated “mystery” in most other English versions. “Lawlessness” is the wanton disregard of God’s ordained code of right and wrong as established in His Word (i.e., the Torah). So, the phrase “secret power of lawlessness” may refer to the fact that “lawlessness” (or, evil) is imbued with a hidden power that its adherents won’t figure out until it’s too late. Evil individuals may think they are getting away with something (by thumbing their noses at God) when in fact they are sealing their own doom and destruction. This “mystery (or, secret power) of lawlessness” was already at work on a limited scale in the world 2,000 years ago, continues today, and will become progressively more pronounced as we approach the end of the age. We certainly see a malignant and militant casting off of all restraints at work in our generation; but, the end result (i.e., defeat and destruction) will be hidden until it’s too late from those who find themselves trapped in its deceptive web.

¹² See the footnote at 2 Thessalonians 2:5-7 in *The ESV Study Bible* for an alternate interpretation that says the Restrainer in this passage is the Archangel Michael.

¹³ Proponents of this view point out that the Holy Spirit lives in believers (Rom. 8:9-11; 1 Cor. 3:16) rather than in any earthly structure. He indwells us. So, when the believing community is “snatched up” in the Rapture (1 Thess. 4:17), the Holy Spirit’s abiding presence will go with us. At that point, presumably, God’s presence in the world will revert to the way it was in the OT dispensation, when His Spirit came upon certain people at definite times for specific purposes (e.g., Num. 24:2; Judges 3:10, 6:34, 11:29, 14:19; 1 Sam. 10:10, 11:6, 16:13, 18:10.)

¹⁴ When deception takes root, it can become a full-blown delusion.

¹⁵ Sometimes we use the term “Second Coming” to designate both the Rapture and the coming in glory seven years later. They are two phases of the same return, one when He comes *for* His saints (1 Thess. 4:16-17) and the other when He comes *with* them (1 Thess. 3:13; Jude 14).

¹⁶ The Bible says, *So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God* (Rom. 10:17).

¹⁷ “Apocalyptic upbringing: how I recovered from my terrifying evangelical childhood” by Josiah Hesse (*The Guardian*, April 5, 2016; accessed at theguardian.com). Immature and out-of-control apocalypticism can be devastating and gives the world an opportunity to cast believers in an unfavorable light, like this story did in the United Kingdom. Just google “recovering fundamentalists,” “recovering evangelicals,” or “Christianity Anonymous” and you’ll find many other testimonials similar to Josiah’s. Rather than dismissing them, we should listen and learn from what they have to say.

¹⁸ A common theme in those days was that the Second Coming would take place within a “generation” of the founding of the modern State of Israel in 1948. If a biblical generation was 40 years, as Lindsey claimed at the time, that would have placed the Second Coming events (i.e., the Rapture and subsequent coming in glory) sometime in the 1980s.

¹⁹ Whisenant’s *88 Reasons* book sold an estimated 4.5 million copies worldwide (“Late Great Planet Earth and Other Prophecy Books” by Kayla Webley in *Time* magazine [May 20, 2011], accessed at content.time.com).

²⁰ “Answers in Genesis Astronomer Explores Arguments That Jesus Christ Will Return on September 23” by Stoyan Zaimov in *Christian Post* (September 15, 2017).

²¹ For more information, see *The Revelation 12 Sign: A Prophetic Sign for the Ages* by Phil Moser (Bloomington, IN: Archway Self-Publishing, 2017). Since the date has already passed, copies of the book are available online at bargain basement prices. At least one former advocate of the “Revelation 12 Sign” has publicly apologized for her failure to keep her zeal in check and we commend her for her humility and transparency (see “The Day When Time Stood Still” by Stephanie Dawn on the *Unsealed* website at unsealed.org).

²² You’d be surprised at the critical email we receive whenever we point out that even though we are strongly pretribulationist, we don’t fight over the timing of the Rapture. We respect those who hold other views. Sadly, some pugnacious people are intent on sowing discord and strife even over a difference of only seven years, which most reasonable people would agree is a drop in the bucket when compared to the vastness of eternity.

²³ Depending on the context, “the West” generally refers to Western Europe and the Americas, as opposed to Eastern Europe (the former Soviet Bloc) and other areas of Eurasia.

²⁴ Yes, Western civilization is indeed Christian to its core, irrespective of the efforts of Islamists and others to portray the West as inherently irreligious, religiously neutral, or even secular. See “Yes, the Christian West” by Conrad Black in *National Review* (July 31, 2013; accessed at nationalreview.com). The degradation of the West—which we all recognize—doesn’t change its essential nature or its roots in the Judeo-Christian tradition.

²⁵ For example, see “More protests: Highway 24 blocked; vandalism, looting in Berkeley” by Kate Williams, Erin Allday, and Evan Sernoffsky in *SFGate* (*San Francisco Chronicle* for Jan. 22, 2015; accessed at sfgate.com).

²⁶ It’s also likely that the Antichrist by this time will have brokered a peace agreement in the Middle East (Dan. 9:27), which will only add to his magnetic, worldwide appeal. He will have succeeded where everyone else since 1948—including every US president since Harry Truman—has failed.

²⁷ Revelation 18 describes *political/economic* Babylon, the end-time, one-world commercial system apart from which no one will be able to transact business during the Tribulation. Revelation 17 is about *religious* Babylon, the end-time, apostate, one-world religious amalgamation headed by the “false prophet” (19:20; 20:10). These two “beasts” (i.e., the Antichrist at the head of political Babylon and the False Prophet at the head of religious Babylon) will have a perverse, symbiotic relationship (13:12).

²⁸ Contextually speaking, the signs in Matthew 24 belong to the future Tribulation Period (v. 29). However, that doesn’t mean they won’t be noticeable prior to that time (while the Church is still here). Prior to the Tribulation, they will be more like prophetic *trends* (still developing) than actual signs of the impending end.

²⁹ Pretribulationists recognize that there will be a global, Messianic Jewish campaign to proclaim the Gospel during the Tribulation (while the Church is in Heaven), and multitudes of earth-dwellers will come to faith, many of whom will be martyred (Rev. 7:9-14; 14:1-7).

³⁰ In Verse 8, the Lord says, “*All these [signs] are the beginning of sorrows.*” The word “sorrows” here is *odin* (ὠδίν) in the Greek and it means “labor pains.” The Lord is comparing these signs of the end to the painful contractions a pregnant woman experiences just before she gives birth. The contractions become progressively more intense, and closer together, until the baby is finally born. That’s how certain events during the Tribulation will become prophetic signs. They become increasingly more pronounced, more intense, and closer together, until the Lord returns at the close of the Armageddon Campaign. Interestingly, there is also a phenomenon known as “false labor,” which can be misread as an indication that birth is imminent when it’s really not. Likewise, premature signs can be misinterpreted due to our own, misguided zeal and wishful thinking.

Bible Questions AND Answers

by DR. GARY HEDRICK

Have a Bible question?

Submit it to Dr. Hedrick at garyh@cjfm.org, or mail it to 611 Broadway, San Antonio, Texas 78215.

You may see your question addressed in a future issue of *Messianic Perspectives*.

QUESTION: *You've said that the New Jerusalem descends from heaven onto the Middle East at the beginning of the Millennium. However, I've always been of the opinion that the City comes down at the close of the Millennium, after the second Battle of Gog and Magog (Rev. 20:8). After that battle, the present world will be destroyed by fire (2 Peter 3:10-13) and subsequently replaced by the "new heavens and new earth" (Rev. 21:1). The "New" Jerusalem will be part of that "new" heavens and earth. Am I mistaken?*

ANSWER: Excellent question! And you're right about the "new" Jerusalem being part of the "new" heavens and earth. According to the Books of Isaiah and Revelation, they both appear at the same time. But, that's not really the question here. The issue is *when* they appear. That is, when will the New Jerusalem come down and the heavens and earth become "new"?

I myself used to believe and teach that the New Jerusalem wouldn't come down from the heavenlies until after the Millennium. However, my thinking was challenged on this matter by reading two books—one by my good friend Janet Willis (*What on Earth Is Heaven Like?*) and another by Randy Alcorn (*Heaven*).

The two entities (i.e., the New Jerusalem and the new heavens/earth) are closely related in the prophetic Scriptures. As you pointed out, the most obvious connection is that both are called "new." The New Jerusalem won't settle in the Middle East until the "new heavens and new earth" become a reality.

There's an extended Messianic prophecy in Isaiah 65 and 66 that's clearly about the future Millennium. It says, *"The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, The lion shall eat straw like the ox, And dust shall be the serpent's food. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain," says the LORD* (65:25). A few verses earlier, the LORD says He will renew the Creation during the Millennium: *"For behold I create new heavens and a new earth; And the former shall not be remembered or come to mind"* (v. 17). The next verse says Jerusalem will be part of that new creation (hence, New Jerusalem) during the Millennium (v. 18). So, this extended passage in Isaiah (Chapters 65 and 66) equates the Millennium with the "new heavens and a new earth."

One common-sense reason we believe the New Jerusalem will be on the earth during the Millennium is that its gates will be carefully guarded so that "there shall by no means enter it anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb's Book of Life" (Rev. 21:27). We know evil will be lurking in the shadows during the Millennium because the thousand-year period ends with a massive battle between the forces of good and evil (20:7-10). So, during

the Millennium, it will be necessary to guard the City's 12 gates. But after that, no more evil-doers will remain. There will be no need to guard or protect the City's gates.

Nonetheless, many evangelicals believe the New Jerusalem comes down after, not before, the Millennium. One reason is that the Holy City is mentioned in Revelation 21:2, which comes after the mention of the Millennium in Chapter 20. However, how sure can we be that the last three chapters of Revelation are meant to be interpreted chronologically? The answer is, we can't be sure. Many of us believe that Chapters 21 and 22 go back and elaborate on the events recorded by John in Chapter 20 (similar to the way Genesis 2 backtracks and expands on the events recorded by Moses in Chapter 1).

Now, what about that passage in 2 Peter 3:10-13? Well, let's take a look:

But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar, and elements will be dissolved, burning with heat, and the earth and the works in it will not be found.

All these things being dissolved in this way, what kind ought you to be? In holy conduct and godliness,

Expecting and hastening the coming of the day of God, by reason of which the heavens will be dissolved, being set on fire, and the elements are melting, burning with heat.

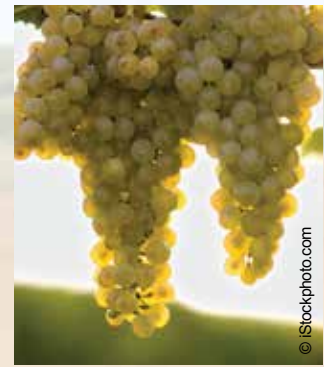
But according to His promise, we are awaiting new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells (Berean Literal Bible).

There are two main interpretations of these verses. First, it is sometimes held (as I once did) that Peter is saying that the old heavens and earth will someday (i.e., after the Millennium) burn up ("dissolve") in a sort of nuclear explosion and be replaced with a brand-new heavens and earth. One problem with this view (as we saw above) is that Isaiah clearly says the Millennium will be the "new heavens and new earth" (65:17). This renewed creation will continue forever, far beyond the initial thousand-year period. We know the Millennium is a renewal of the old earth—not the creation of a completely new and different planet. It's very clear. The prophets even provide geographical markers (including the names of nations and cities, like in Jeremiah 31:38-40) during the Millennium, so we know it's the same earth, only renewed and rejuvenated. The Hebrew word for "new" (*chadash*, חדש), by the way, can denote either (1) a completely new creative act of God or (2) a renewal of something that existed previously (like "new" grain, which reappears each season, or the "new" year that arrives over and over again with every annual cycle).

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Fruit from the Harvest

by Violette Berger



Prayer

Michelle Beadle, CJFM representative (New Orleans) writes about the power of prayer. She is currently meeting for Bible study with a woman who is partially paralyzed and who has made a transition from a nursing home back to independent living. Her home, however, has no furniture other than what the state provided. Noting the condition of her apartment, someone gave her a breakfast table, but without any chairs. Michelle prayed that God would help her find furniture for this woman in need. That same evening, at an Israeli dance club in New Orleans that Michelle usually attends, a man announced that he was giving away four chairs to anyone who needed them. Michelle says, "I could not believe my ears. I was so excited that God was answering my prayers so quickly. The man gladly gave me the chairs, and I was able to deliver them a few days later. They matched her table perfectly! The next time I visited her she had a sofa and love seat in her den from a neighbor down the hall. God is so good to provide exactly what is needed when we pray." Please pray that this woman would receive Jesus as her Lord and Savior, someone who would provide all of her needs.

Faith

CJFM representative Eric Chabot (Columbus, OH) praises God as he looks back on his summer outreach at Columbus State Community College (CSCC). He was blessed by the number of opportunities he and his team had to share the Gospel message and engage in productive spiritual discussions with students of different faiths. In-depth conversations ensued with Jewish, Muslim, and Unitarian students. (Hundreds of Muslim students attend CSCC). He was also blessed by the opportunity to work with a great group of interns from Created Equal, a pro-life ministry based in Columbus. Eric writes: "The interns come into town to receive training and also travel to campuses and other parts of the state to educate people about the pro-life position. Every summer I generally do one full day of training in apologetics for the interns, but this year we decided to do some 'hands-on' training. The interns joined us at CSCC and observed our apologetics outreach for the day. The question of the day was 'Why do people matter?' In other words, 'Why do people spend so much time fighting for the equality, rights, and dignity of other people?' This led back to the question of whether you can ground human value in being image bearers of God or simply human or societal opinion. Following our campus outreach, we spent time addressing some tough questions about faith."

Meanwhile, the Xenos Summer Conference was held at Ohio State University. James Warner Wallace and Sean McDowell were the headline speakers. Eric said, "There was a great turnout, and it was so encouraging to see so

many people interested in hearing truth." Eric's presentation was called "Jesus: Just Another Messianic Pretender or True Messiah?" Eric also taught a series of classes at Xenos Christian Fellowship on the following topics: "The Resurrection from a Jewish Perspective" and "How Should a Christian View Israel?" The apologetics ministry has featured posts on their main blog and has gotten traffic from all over the world. Please pray that these teachings continue to open doors to discuss serious issues and how they affect our daily lives.

Israel's 70th Birthday (Las Vegas)

Richard Hill, CJFM representative (Las Vegas) and pastor of Beth Yeshua Messianic Congregation, and his volunteer team were blessed to participate in Israel's 70 year anniversary. The Israeli American Council (IAC) celebrated Israel's 70th Independence Day this year at the Venetian Casino/Resort in Las Vegas. Thousands of Jewish people joined the celebration. Rich and his team wore their evangelistic "I Love Israel" T-shirts in support of Israel. Rich writes: "We were able to be the light at the festival. We shared the Good News message of Yeshua with two Jewish people, and in fact, met again with an elderly Jewish man who used to curse us for many years at the UNLV campus. He actually was somewhat nice to me. Praise the Lord! Please pray for our outreach to the Jewish people of Las Vegas."

Israel's 70th Birthday (Israel)

Shortly after Israel celebrated its 70th birthday, and rejoiced that Jerusalem is now recognized as its capital city, events in the Middle East began to intensify. **Yosef Ovadia, CJFM representative and pastor of Kehilat Haderech Messianic Congregation (Israel)**, writes: "Israel has experienced rocket and mortar attacks on an almost daily basis. On one particular day, there were 200 rockets shot from Gaza on our southern towns and villages. In other instances, rockets or unmanned aircraft from Syria penetrated our northern borders. In addition, there have also been terror attacks around the borders and within the land. There is a growing feeling that an inevitable war is brewing. Iran is the engine and fuel behind Israel's enemies on both the northern and southern borders. The Body of Christ in the land is at a very sensitive point. Please stand with us. Prayer for God's protection and for a clear vision for us as a congregation is crucial at this phase, as the challenges are increasing. Nevertheless, we know who is the Light of the World, and we keep our eyes on Him—the only one who can save us—our Lord Yeshua."

Then Jesus spoke to them again, saying, "I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life" (John 8:12).



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Another problem with this first interpretation is the broader context of the passage. Earlier in the chapter, Peter talks about the Great Flood, by which God destroyed the world (v. 6). So he's comparing the future "destruction" of the world (by "fire"; vv. 10-13) with the judgment (by water) that took place in Noah's day. So, did God destroy the whole planet in the Flood? No, He destroyed the civilization of surface-dwellers that had corrupted it. The globe itself remained intact, with some topographical changes due to the hydrologic forces associated with the Flood.

The second interpretation (which I prefer) says Peter is teaching that the earth will pass through the "fire" of God's judgment (i.e., the Tribulation, the Day of the LORD) and emerge as a renewed creation in which righteousness dwells. The melting of the elements is the burning away of wood, hay, and stubble. This is consistent with (1) the use of the imagery of "fire" for judgment and purification (e.g., 1 Cor. 3:12-13), (2) Paul's teaching in Romans 8:18-25, where he says the present creation will someday be "set free" (renewed), not destroyed (v. 21), and (3) the many statements in Scripture that the earth will endure "forever": *And He built His sanctuary like the heights, Like the earth which He has established forever* (Psalm 78:69). Also, *You who laid the foundations of the earth, So that it should not be moved forever* (104:5). And, finally, *A generation goes, and a generation comes, but the earth remains forever* (Eccles. 1:4). People who object to our use of these texts say the psalms passages are speaking from a human perspective, but the statements themselves aren't

necessarily true. (Theologians call this "accommodation.") We respectfully disagree. In the absence of any compelling reason to view a passage as allegory or symbolism, we believe God says what He means and means what He says!

What about other passages that seem to say the earth will someday be destroyed? Like, *Of old You laid the foundation of the earth, And the heavens are the work of Your hands. They will perish, but You will endure; Yes, they will all grow old like a garment; Like a cloak You will change them, And they will be changed* (Psalm 102:25-26). We're not going to blow smoke here and say this passage isn't a challenge. It is! However, there are plausible explanations. For instance, this passage could be referring to the "long view" of what happens when our solar system begins to wear out (like an old item of clothing). Scientists say, for example, that the sun will begin to run out of hydrogen in five billion years or so. So, what will we do when our sun starts to transition into a red giant in preparation for its eventual death? Will we board spaceships and journey to other, newer planets and resettle ourselves there? We will undoubtedly possess the technology by then to do so; however, I don't think it'll be necessary. Verse 26 says when that time comes, God will "change" (Heb., *calaph*, *חָלַף*; lit., "renew") the heavens and the earth once again. He will recharge them so they continue to exist. So, this passage may actually confirm our contention that the new heavens and new earth will endure forever. Billions of years from now, when they're about to run out of energy and expire, God will simply recharge them!

