

The Lesson of History

Throughout the past two thousand years, Jews and Christians have anticipated the coming of The Messiah. At any time, there have been people expecting it to occur at any moment. Each group has reckoned there has never been a time in such a desperate need for divine intervention as their own.

The methods used by people to show that the Messiah's Coming is imminent have relied on Scriptural passages or on nationalistic idealism. For the Zionist Jew, having the promise of a Jewish state within his grasp, it is usually the latter that provides his impetus.

Many Christians apply apocalyptic prophecies to their time, calculate prophetic times to finish in their generation and point to contemporary signs such as inventions and wars. In each case, the Coming is shown to be "close at hand".

When the expectation of one group fades into the past, another is raised, its expectations heightened that the promise is being fulfilled upon their generation. This process has been repeated countless times. Just as Jesus warned.

The Temple of Solomon

From all accounts, the temple built by Solomon at Jerusalem was magnificent. It shone brilliantly, glistening in the sun, showing forth Yahweh's blessing upon his people.

With justifiable pride, Jesus' disciples pointed out its glorious features. Imagine their shock when he told them a time was coming when not one of those glorious stones would be left standing upon another!

They reasoned that the destruction of the Temple must surely occur at the very End of all things, at the glorious

Coming of the Messiah. Eagerly, they sought to know more. The Gospels of Matthew (chapters 24 and 25), Mark (13) and Luke (21) record Jesus's response.

"Many shall be deceived"

Firstly, Jesus warned his disciples, many would come in his name, not opposers, and many many sincere people would be deceived. Some would claim to be Jesus. Hence the need to beware and take extreme caution.

Be not concerned

While he was warning his disciples of these deceptions, Jesus told them not to be swayed by events in the physical world. Deceivers would use man-made horrors such as war, and the destructive forces of nature such as earthquakes, as signs of his imminent Coming.

However, Jesus said, such calamities are not signs of *deliverance*, they are the beginnings of *distress*. Even though the disciples would see such events and would hear reports of catastrophes, Jesus warned them not to be deceived by those who used them as evidence of Jesus' Coming. Down the centuries, many have used calamities as being the portents of the Coming, but Jesus' warning has protected the faithful.

Life as normal

In pointing to the times of Noah, when divine judgement was poured upon Earth, Jesus pointedly states that life was going on as normal right up to the time that the Ark was filled.

Of the past two thousand years, this is likely the best to have lived in. The

control and treatment of disease, the care of the underprivileged, the rights of individuals, freedom of religious expression, the relative reduction in death from hostilities, the egalitarian dispersal of resources, and so on, have never been better.

These improvements have resulted in longer life and in better health care than in previous centuries. Certainly there are grave difficulties, seemingly insurmountable, but these result from the very recent increase in world population that the improved conditions have brought. There are certainly areas of deep concern, such as when famine, disease and disaster strike, but the world wide response knows of no previous parallel.

This does not mean that Jesus could not come soon. Events in the physical

world do not determine the timing, nor may they be used to interpret Scripture.

He will come

There is no doubt that Jesus is coming. Never does Scripture question that. Equally as emphatically, man does not know nor cannot tell when it will happen. For the sake of Faith, this is as it should be.

Man is unable to call on any form of divination to determine the time of the Coming. Indeed, Jesus is coming at exactly the time when he will be least expected. Whether there is peace or war, sunshine or flood, these are irrelevant. Jesus is coming when God determines. Live in Faith, not by sight.

Scripture Texts

The question

As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately. "Tell us," they said, "when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?" (Matt 24:3)

Do not be concerned

You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are *not alarmed*. Such things must happen, but *the end is still to come*. (Matt 24:6)

When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, *do not be alarmed*. Such things must happen, but the end *is still to come*. (Mark 13:7)

When you hear of wars and revolutions, *do not be frightened*. These things must happen *first*, but the end will *not come right away*. (Luke 21:9)

Do not be deceived

Jesus answered: "Watch out that no one *deceives* you. For *many* will come in my name, claiming, 'I am the Christ,' and will *deceive many*. (Matt 24:4,5)

Many false prophets will appear and *deceive many* people. (Matt 24:11)

For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform *great signs and miracles to deceive* even the elect--if that were possible. (Matt 24:24)

Jesus said to them: "Watch out that no one *deceives* you. *Many* will come in my name, claiming, 'I am he,' and will *deceive many*. (Mark 13:5 - 6)

For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform *signs and miracles to deceive* the elect--if that were possible. (Mark 13:22)

He replied: "Watch out that you are not *deceived*. For *many* will come in my name, claiming, 'I am he,' and, '*The time is near*.' Do not follow them. (Luke 21:8)

Life will be normal

As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; (Matt 24:37-38)

"Just as it was in the days of Noah, so also will it be in the days of the Son of Man. People were eating, drinking, marrying and being given in marriage up to the day Noah entered the ark. Then the flood came and destroyed them all. (Luke 17:26-27)

"It was the same in the days of Lot. People were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building. But the day Lot left Sodom, fire and sulfur rained down from heaven and destroyed them all. (Luke 17:28-29)

When you do not expect

"*No one knows* about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but *only the Father*. (Matt 24:36)

They *knew nothing* about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. (Matt 24:39)

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So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour *when you do not expect* him. (Matt 24:44)

The master of that servant will come on a day *when he does not expect* him and at an hour he is not aware of. (Matt 24:50)

Therefore keep watch, because you do *not know* the day or the hour. (Matt 25:13)

"No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but *only the Father*. (Mark 13:32)

You also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come *at* an hour *when you do not expect* him." (Luke 12:40)

The master of that servant will come on a day *when he does not expect* him and at an hour he is not aware of. (Luke 12:46)

"Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with dissipation, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and *that day will close on you unexpectedly* like a trap. (Luke 21:34)

The answer

And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come. (Matt 24:14)

On The Watch

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