

End Times

Books on prophecy sell well. Teachers on prophecy get a ready hearing. I have read my share of prophetic literature, written by "experts." who had the future all mapped out. For years Russia has been a favourite subject for students in prophecy. In 1974 the Moody Bible Institute published a book entitled *The Coming Invasion of Israel*. The authors were sure that Russia was going to attack Israel. By means of symbolic visions Ezekiel 36 to 39 was supposed to chronicle the coming "Russo-Israel" war. The book discusses the actual battle campaigns and the outcome, as seen by the "war Correspondent, Ezekiel." In his book *Will Man Survive? The Bible Looks At Man's Future*, Dwight Pentecost says that the Bible and prophetic students are generally agreed that the land of Magog is the land known today as Russia. God is aligning the Arab states, and Egypt is bringing them under the leadership of Russia to attack Israel. But dramatic changes in the Soviet Union have changed the prophetic scenario. The USSR is no longer a superpower. Its empire has disintegrated. The only superpower left is the U.S.A.

On October 28, 1992, members of the Mission for the Coming Days Church in South Korea were anxiously waiting for the coming of the Lord. Their leader had convinced them that this would be the day they would be taken to heaven. Hundreds or possibly thousands apparently sold their property, abandoned their families, quit schools and jobs, and deserted military posts. October 28 has come and gone but the Lord has not come again for His saints. Christians have often been misled by "date-setters,," a painful experience for those whose hopes were crushed. Yet no fact about our Lord's return is more evident than the Bible's deliberate silence regarding a precise date. Our Lord Himself said, "No one knows about that day or hour, but only the Father" (Matt.24:36). Not fascination with dates but Christ Himself is at the center of the Bible and its teachings on the "last things." With this in mind Christians in every generation have refused to withdraw from the world. They participated in the church's world-wide mission, keeping in mind the Lord's command "occupy till I come"(Luke19:13). The church father Tertullian (d.c.225) provides an example. In his *Apologia* he even prays for the delay of Christ's coming so that the gospel may spread throughout the world.

The Korean Mission for the Coming Days Church was misguided in its date setting. Yet we can draw a lesson from its zeal. Our Lord commanded His disciples to watch for His return. "Keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour" (Matt.25:13).

No doctrine is more prominent in all of the New Testament than that of the promised personal return of Christ. He will come in glory and with great power. As Christ came the first time so He will come again. We are even warned against scepticism about the Lord's return (2 Pet.3: 1-13).

Bible students may not read current events into the scriptures. Dr. Farton J. Payne, who wrote an Encyclopedia of Biblical Prophecy, *The Complete Guide to Scriptural Predictions and Their Fulfillment*, observed that the sin of interpreters throughout the history of the Christian church has been that of assuming that their own point in time must be directly connected with our Lord's return. Dr. Payne's observation is so true. In each age Christians

have believed that they were living in the last times. Calamitous events have been with mankind ever since Adam and Eve's fall into sin. Each generation has believed that the prophets had their generation in mind. Mickelsen admonishes. "Read nothing into prophecy that is not there. It is just as dangerous to put more on the map than God put there, as it is to remove any part of that which he did enfold."

Christ is coming again. He could come indeed today. Prophecies of the last time such as 2 Timothy 3:1-7 suggests the present. The truth touching the Second Coming of Christ should not be a matter of mere speculation. The early Christians longed for their Lord's return. How many are now eagerly watching and even longing for His return?

David Koresh's absurd interpretation of Revelation and the horrible, fiery end of this raving cult leader and his followers have led journalists, who are usually not known for their Biblical literacy, to write with condescension on the subject of Christ's Second Coming. They tend to put all who believe in the literal second coming of Christ into the same category as the weird apocalyptic cults. When wacky sensational end-time predications hit the news, religion all of a sudden gets attention. People shake their heads in disbelief. They say with a straight face, "How can these religious nuts believe such primitive predictions?" But religious cults have no monopoly on wacky end time predictions. The same people who wouldn't darken the door of a church, synagogue or any other place of worship, have their own prophets of doom, whose predictions are as weird as those of religious cultists. The '60s featured Paul Ehrlich's huge best-seller, *The Population Bomb*, a wrong prediction of the end of the world brought on by overpopulation by -1983. Others predict an economic apocalypse. An other best-seller was *The Crash of '79*. Since the public seems to have a short memory for faulty date setting, the same author wrote *The Panic of '89*. Christianity has received a bad press. Regrettably, many evangelicals are still caught up in end time forecasting. *The Jerusalem Courier & Prophecy Digest* sees the new political and economic united states of a Europe as a sign of the end times. The paper also suggests that a study of Adolf Hitler will help Christians to better understand and to prepare to confront the advancing New World Order and the extreme New Age Movement, of which Hitler is said to have been knowledgeably a part.

Scripture doesn't encourage Christians to become preoccupied with apocalyptic forecasting. Our Lord gave the book of Revelation to encourage the persecuted, suffering church to stay true to Him. The early Christians believed in Christ's soon return. This gave them a real sense of urgency to carry out our Lord's mission mandate. Jesus had promised that the end would not come until the gospel of the kingdom had been preached throughout the world to all nations (Matth.24:24;cf., Mark 13:10). We are to preach the Word, work and witness in anticipation of Christ's soon return. The church must be on the move as God's instrument to beseech all people everywhere to be reconciled to God. From God's perspective the time is short. Our lord said, 'I am coming soon'. Amen. Come, Lord Jesus (Rev. 22:20).

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