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CAN WE KNOW THE “TIMES AND SEASONS” OF CHRIST’S RETURN?

By Rodney Pitts

Recently a man asked me if I am a preacher and, more importantly, if I believe that Jesus is coming soon. In response I stated that although I am a preacher, the scriptures teach that no one knows the time of the Lord’s return. For, Jesus states that “Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away. But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only” (Matt. 24:35-36). This, unfortunately, did little to dissuade him, seeing that he replied with the idea that Jesus only said we cannot know the day or the hour, but that we can surely know the “times and the seasons” of Christ’s return. For, he claimed that Paul affirmed this in 1 Thessalonians 5:1-2. Well, can we know the “times and seasons” of the Lord’s return, while being unable to specify the day or hour? This is the question I would like to address.

1 Thessalonians 5:1-2 and the “times and seasons”

Although the man mentioned above presented 1 Thessalonians 5:1-2 as proof that we *can* know the times and seasons of the Lord’s return, the truth is that this passage teaches the very opposite. For, after writing of Christ’s return (4:15-18), Paul then says, “But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you. For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night” (5:1-2). Now, if the “times and seasons” of Christ’s return are different from the “day” of Christ’s return, why would the fact that these brethren “knew perfectly that the **day** of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night” mean that Paul

did not need to speak of the “**times and seasons**” of Christ’s return? Does not the language of Paul instead equate the “day” of Christ’s return with the “times and seasons” of Christ’s return, indicating that to know that Christ’s return will come “like a thief in the night” means that speaking of “times and season” of His return is futile? Sound interpretation necessitates that we accept this to be the teaching of the passage.

Although dispensational premillennialists, as was this man, would likely retort that Paul goes on to say, “But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief” (5:4), inferring from this that Christians actually can know the “times and seasons” of Christ’s return, their conclusion violates the context. For, Paul is comparing those outside of Christ who live their lives without knowledge of, or who deny, the return of Christ and the destruction it will bring to the wicked (5:3) with Christians who should know better and be constantly prepared for Christ’s return as a result of the Spirit’s warnings. That this interpretation is correct is seen in the fact that **constant vigilance**, not just during some particular time or season, is demanded of Paul’s readers. For, it is commanded, “Therefore let us not sleep, as others *do*, but let us watch and be sober” (5:6), and “...let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and *as* a helmet the hope of salvation” (5:8). Are we to assume that we are only to seek to be sober, to watch, and to put on faith, love, and hope during the “times and seasons” of Christ’s return? Who can believe it?

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Where are the “times and seasons” of Christ’s return revealed?

If God wants us to know the times and seasons of Christ’s return, where are they revealed in Scripture? To answer this premillennialists will point to Matthew 24 where Jesus tells of how before the end comes there will be nation rising against nation, famines, pestilence, earthquakes, persecution and death of the disciples from the world’s hatred of Him, betrayals, plus the fact that the gospel has to be preached to all nations (Matthew 24:4-14). Yet, as pointed out at the beginning of this article, Jesus presented the time frame of these signs as **happening during the generation of the disciples there with Him**. He states, “So you also, when you see all these things, know that it is near—at the doors! Assuredly, I say to you, **this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place**” (Matthew 24:33-34, emp. mine, rp). Therefore, the “end” Jesus is speaking of could not be referring to His second return.

Yet, if the “end” is not referring to Christ’s return, what is Jesus referring to? To answer this, one only has to consider the context in which these statements are found. This conversation was based upon Jesus telling His disciples of the destruction of the Jerusalem temple and their asking “**when** will these things be?” (24:1-3). Therefore, the signs Jesus spoke of relate not to His second coming, but to His coming in judgment upon the Jewish nation and the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple. That this conclusion is correct is seen in Luke’s record of these words of Jesus saying, “But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation is near. Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, let those who are in the midst of her depart, and let not those who are in the country enter her. For these are the days of **vengeance**, that all things which are written may be fulfilled” (Luke 21:20-22, emp. mine, rp). Because these signs relate to the destruction of Jerusalem, which took place in 70 A.D., we can easily understand why Jesus said that they would all take place during the generation of those who were there with Him (Matthew 24:33-34). And, the other instructions concerning fleeing so quickly as to not gather up one’s possessions, the Judeans fleeing to the mountains, and the difficulties of being pregnant or trying to get out of a closed up

Jerusalem on the Sabbath, all make sense.

We cannot know the “times or the seasons” of Christ’s return

That we cannot know the times or the seasons of Jesus’ return is also seen in the fact that even the apostles were not allowed this information. In Acts 1 when the disciples asked the risen Jesus, “Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” (1:6), Jesus responded, “It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority” (1:7). Now, it should be remembered that the time of restoring the kingdom to Israel is the very heart of premillennialism! So, if this information was to be revealed to all Christians, the apostles would have received it first through the Holy Spirit. Yet, since they were not to know such things, it is, therefore, impossible for us to know them also (1 Corinthians 2:6-13; Hebrews 2:1-4). Now, an attempt would likely be made by premillennialists to claim that because Jesus goes on in Acts 1 to promise that the Holy Spirit would be given to them so that they could “witness” of Christ to the world (Acts 1:8), when the Holy Spirit came it would *then* reveal to the apostles the “times and seasons” of Christ’s return to restore the kingdom to Israel. Yet, this cannot be correct because Jesus did not say to the apostles that “it is not for you **right now** to know the times or seasons, but the Holy Spirit will reveal it **later**.” Jesus said, “It is **not for you to know** times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority.” That is a definitive statement that they were never going to get this information!

So, can we know the times or the seasons of Jesus’ return? The biblical answer is “no.” Anyone who tells you otherwise ignores, is ignorant of, is deceived concerning, or twists the teaching of scripture. The time of Jesus’ return is a secret that only the Father knows (Matthew 24:36). Therefore, we must be vigilant at all times, watching for Christ to return to give His people eternal rest in heaven and take vengeance on the wicked who do not obey the gospel (2 Thessalonians 1:6-8). ■

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