

Why is it Wrong for Christians to Predict When Christ Will Return to Earth?

By Dr. John Ankerberg and Dr. John Weldon

Biblical prophecy and eschatology are both fascinating and spiritually encouraging subjects as any Christian who has studied them will testify. They are also difficult subjects to deal with responsibly because not all prophecy is equally clear.

But if the Bible is clear on anything, it is that no one knows the specific time of Christ's return. Jesus Himself stated, "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority" (Acts 1:7) and in reference to His return, "But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone" (Matt. 24:36). (While on earth even Jesus lived by faith and had voluntarily declined the use of His divine attributes.) Didn't Jesus warn Christians that we were to "Be on guard! Be alert! You **do not know** when that time will come" (Mark 13:33).

Thus, when Christ said that no one knows the time of His return, He obviously included present-day believers. "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; cf., Mark 13:33–37; Luke 12:41–48).

But, for some reason, a lot of Christians aren't listening to Jesus.

In *I Predict 2000*, Lester Sumrall says that at the year 2000 A.D. Jesus Christ shall be reigning from Jerusalem for 1,000 years.

Harold Camping indicated Christ would return in September of 1994 according to his best-selling book *1994?*.

Edgar Whisenant's five million best-seller *88 Reasons Why the Rapture Will Be in 1988* declared that Christ's coming would occur in 1988.

In her *Watch and Be Ready! 1992 Millions Disappear*, D. A. Miller claimed, "God is a date setter."¹

Unfortunately, millions of Christians have been taken in by books like this and experienced the same disappointment that cult members such as the Jehovah's Witnesses have found through the false prophecies of the Watchtower Society.²

Isn't it amazing that some believers will actually claim to know more than Jesus?

What about all the alleged evidences to "prove" that we are in the final generation of history? In *99 Reasons Why No One Knows When Christ Will Return*, B. J. Oropeza shows why none of these alleged evidences are *proof* that Christ will return in this generation. He also shows why so-called biblical numerology, current world affairs, supposed individual prophecies, etc., can't offer any solid evidence for a **specific** date of Christ's return.

The truth is that we **can** know that we are living in the "last days" but that we **can not** know how long these days will last. Technically, the last days began with the institution of the Church era (Acts 2:16–17). While certain events in the world today are clearly suggestive that Christ's return may not be far off (e.g., the rebirth of Israel), such events cannot be considered absolute proof this generation will see Christ's return.

The knowledge of fulfilled prophecy and the sure knowledge of Christ's eventual return should be of great comfort to Christians. But the question is not so much whether we should be ready to meet God at such and such a date in the future, but are we ready to meet Him now? Death can overtake any one of us at any moment. Whenever Christ returns, His people must be ready for Him. Those who have lived godly lives and expressed

devoted, sacrificial concern for Christ's interests will be rewarded at His coming; those who have lived for worldly pleasures and themselves only will not. They will be saved, yet "only as one escaping through the flames" (1 Cor. 3:10–15).

The real purpose of knowledge about Christ's coming is not knowing a specific date, but the encouragement to live godly in this life so that we won't be ashamed when Christ does return (1 Thes. 5:1–11; 2 Pet. 3:10–12; 1 John 2:28).

Unfortunately, the current genre of date-setting books reveals many Christians have little concern for proper biblical interpretation or careful study of the Scripture.

This is why speculation over date-setting must be rejected by Christians for the general health of the church. These books may have sold millions of copies, but what of the spiritual damage they accomplished through false predictions?

Speculation about the pyramids of Egypt, UFOs, prophecies of Nostradamus, Marian Apparitions, cloning the Antichrist, vanishing hitchhikers, and careless rumors about the increase of vultures in Israel, the Social Security Administration, Procter & Gamble, Henry Kissinger, Saddam Hussein, Mikhail Gorbachev, super-computers in Brussels, the universal product code, and others (even hell is allegedly enlarging itself!) not only damage Christians' faith, they damage the credibility of Christianity in the eyes of the world. The truth is that some Christians should be ashamed for promoting unfounded rumors.

Among the consequences of unwarranted speculation and false prophecy are the undermining of a new believer's faith, the mockery of Christianity by skeptics, ruining one's reputation as a teacher, preventing believers from planning for the future, spiritual discouragement, wasting valuable time, and leading potential converts away from Christian faith.³

As Christians, let us rejoice that Christ will return, as He promised, in God's timing. Let us not bring disrepute to the name of Christ among those who do not yet know Him.

Footnotes

1. B. J. Oropeza, *99 Reasons Why No One Knows When Christ Will Return* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1994), 46.

2. John Ankerberg, *The Facts On the Jehovah's Witnesses* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House 1989)

3. Oropeza, 168-175.