

SUMMING UP PROPHECY

By

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When things began heating up in the Middle East, one of the chief prophecy pundits of our time, Hal Lindsay, remarked that “Prophecy is on fast forward” (Biblical Worldview, Jan. 91). He went on to say that he believed we live in the generation that will see Armageddon. Others are trying to identify Iraq as ancient Babylon and use prophecies of Babylon’s destruction, which were fulfilled twenty-five hundred years ago, to describe what is happening today.

The timetable in Hal Lindsey’s *The Late Great Planet Earth* proved to be a false alarm. So was Edgar Whisenant’s prediction that the rapture would take place in 1988. When he was wrong, he merely moved it forward to 1989, and this also failed.

So, what of the plethora of predictions now in process? The many scenarios I have read all differ, so whatever develops, most of them will have been wrong. What if the war ends and proves all the prophetic speculators wrong? Will people then forget what the Bible has to say about the age coming to an end and the final judgment?

All efforts to use scripture to establish a timetable for world events have failed. It is true that the Christians of Jerusalem were given definite signs of the destruction coming on that city, in order that they would know when to leave it and escape the horrible suffering that took place there under God’s judgment (Matt. 24:15–34). But concerning the end of the age, Jesus stated that only the Father knew and that it would come suddenly and unexpectedly (Matt. 24:36–44).

The great variety of predictions on world events miss the main point of Christ’s own prophecy of victory over death by a resurrection to eternal life in the world to come.

It is significant that when Jesus and the apostles discussed the end of the age, they did not concentrate on the works of man, such as political and military events, but rather on the great work of God in the resurrection and judgment. The reality is that whether the present age ends soon or continues for centuries, we all have only a relatively few years before death, and the next event for us after death will be resurrection.

Scripture indicates that God, in His eternity, knows the end from the beginning, and He could give us a detailed outline of future history, but He hasn’t done so, and no doubt, for very good reasons. What He has given us is a demonstration, through Jesus, of the resurrection of the dead. This, according to both Jesus and the apostles, is to take place at the end of the present age and the beginning of the next.

This is the distinct message of Christ. Other religious men died for their people. (Not that their death could bring remission of sins, of course.) History is filled with stories of martyred leaders. But only One could truthfully say, “Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up.” Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are all dead. Moses and David never returned from death. Mohammed and Buddha both remain in the tomb. But the tomb that held Jesus was discovered to be empty on the third day because God raised Him up from death.

The apostles gave eyewitness testimony to the resurrection, and it was the foundation of their preaching. Millions of Christians still hold faith in Christ's resurrection, but for the most part it is used to promote belief in something that survives death, rather than to promote the certainty of Christ's return, the resurrection of all the dead, and the judgment at the end of the age.

The resurrection of Jesus was considered absolutely essential to His purpose, to His living and reigning as Lord. He said, "I lay down my life that I may take it up again" (John 11:17). Paul explained that "If Christ has not been raised, then is our preaching vain, your faith also is vain...you are yet in your sins. Then they also that are fallen asleep in Christ have perished" (I Cor. 15:14, 17-18). Instead of surviving death, Paul contends that the only way out of death is by resurrection.

It is amazing that again we are confronted with those who insist that there will be no physical resurrection and that it is man's spirit that is resurrected. Plain statements of Scripture should dispel this crazy notion. Paul wrote that "Christ died...was buried, and...rose again the third day" (I Cor. 15:4), clearly indicating a bodily resurrection. The resurrected Jesus was "seen" (Acts 1:3, 13:31, I Cor. 15:5ff) and "handled" (Luke 24:38, I John 1:1). He ate before His disciples and called attention to the fact that He was flesh and bones and not a spirit (Luke 24:42, 39). His resurrection is the "firstfruits" of all that sleep in death, meaning that our resurrection will be similar to His (I Cor. 15:23). Paul writes that when Jesus comes from heaven, He will "fashion anew the body of our humiliation, that it may be conformed to the body of his glory" (Phil. 3:21). He further explains that the resurrected body will be incorruptible (immortal), glorious, powerful and spiritual (I Cor. 15:42-44).

For the Christian the spiritual transformation has already taken place. The spirit of the living Christ already abides in him, as He promised (John 14:23). To this extent, we already enjoy the powers of the age to come, called an "earnest of our inheritance" (Eph. 1:13). We therefore are to walk "not after the flesh, but after the spirit" (Rom. 8:4), which is another way of saying that while we live in the present age, we do not live by the false hopes and promises of the present age but by the standards of the age to come.

In spite of great technological advances, the world is still in "the bondage of corruption" awaiting for its deliverance at "the revealing of the sons of God" (Rom. 8:20-21). This is to take place at the time of the resurrection:

"For we know that the whole creation groans and travails in pain together until now. And not only so, but ourselves also, who have the firstfruits of the spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for our adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body" (Rom. 8:22, 23).

Such deliverance must necessarily involve the judgment of God, which is also linked to Christ's return and the resurrection of the dead. The Lord Jesus is to come "from heaven with the angels of his power in flaming fire, rendering vengeance to them that know not God, and to them that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus: who shall suffer punishment, even eternal destruction from the face of the Lord and from the glory of his might, when he shall come to be glorified in his saints..." (II Thess. 1:7-10).

The whole creation is involved in the judgment, destruction and restoration, as Peter asserts, "But the heavens that now are, and the earth...have been stored up for fire, being reserved against the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly man...the

elements shall be dissolved with fervent heat; and the earth and the works that are therein shall be burned up...But according to his promise, we look for new heavens and anew earth, wherein dwells righteousness” (II Peter 3:7, 10, 13). Thus the present age passes away, the creation is delivered from its bondage of corruption and the saints are resurrected to live in a new creation, in a new age.

This is when the “rapture” takes place, as described earlier by Paul:

“For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven, with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first; then we that are alive, that are left, shall together with them be caught up in clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord” (I Thess. 4:16–17).

It is this Resurrection Truth that gives us assurance of God’s live in the present context of world suffering. It is faith in this Resurrection Truth that enables us to live in the present age with confidence that it is all worthwhile. “our light affliction, which is for the moment, works for us more and more exceedingly an eternal weight of glory” (II Cor. 4:17).

God’s purpose is inexorable. It will be accomplished, and indeed, is being accomplished in His people from day to day. The question is not when the end of the age will come but whether or not we are living according to His will in the present age, for Resurrection Truth guarantees a day of judgment (Acts 17:31). The bottom line in prophecy is the Resurrection event.

From the Resurrection perspective, all world events are seen in relation to God’s ultimate purpose. Each person is confronted with the choice of living for the present temporary age or the age to come.

“Seeing that these things are thus all to be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in all holy living and godliness?” (II Peter 3:11).

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