

THE MILLENNIUM WATCH

By

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As the year 2000 gets closer there is an increasing zeal to attach every event to some Bible prophecy and give dire warnings of approaching disasters and judgments. Many of these prophecies were fulfilled long ago, but they are still useful to get attention and form the basis for sensational sermons.

The real end of the 2000 years from the birth of Christ came in 1996. That's because there was a mistake of 4 years made in our present calendar, so that according to it Jesus was born in 4 B.C. Events which the modern prophets claim are to happen at the end of the 20th century would have happened two years ago, in 1996, had these prophets been right.

However, there is a very real disaster looming on the brink of the year 2,000, even if it isn't found in Bible prophecies. It is known as the "Year 2000 computer bug", or the "Y2K" problem. In the early days of computers the programmers saved space, which was at a premium, by omitting the first two digits of the year, so that 1956 was simply 56. When the computers change from 1999 to 2000, they will go to "00" which the computer will interpret as 1900. This could cause chaos in transportation, banking, utilities, hospitals, factories, and just about every service and business in the country, to the extent that many fear that it will cause the greatest problems the western world has ever faced.

Many, whose personal computers are compliant with the year 2000, say that it's no big deal. But it is a big deal to government, banks and industry as they scramble for programmers to "fix it" but can't find enough of them, even at \$300 an hour. Programmers say it will take much longer than the time left from now until Dec. 31, 1999, and the cost is estimated at \$600 billion. At a recent congressional hearing, Gene Dodaro of the U.S. General Accounting Office warned that "critical services could be severely disrupted." A bank run could bankrupt thousands of banks. Some think the emergency could call for Martial Law to be declared. Newsweek of June 2, 1997 calls it "the day the world shuts down," and suggests that it will be a matter of survival.

Some who are already aware of the problem have asked for my opinion on what should be done. Many newsletter writers and financial advisors are selling books on how to survive the Y2K catastrophe. Some are selling instructions on how to take advantage of the situation and get rich. They are suggesting that we find some remote area to live, with plenty of ammunition to protect ourselves against hungry mobs.

All of this may sound very practical, but somehow it doesn't seem to fit with the teaching Jesus gave his disciples. When the disciples were warned of the coming judgment on Jerusalem they were told to get out when they saw the Roman armies surrounding them (Matt. 24:15-16), but this was God's judgment on a specific people in a specific place,

quite different from the Y2K problem which is the result of a serious mistake, but not an evil act of the programmers.

It would be foolish not to take some precautions. See that all your money is not in the bank, as a run on the bank might cause its closure. Small bills are better. Have several days supply of food and water, as utilities may be disrupted for a time. Prepare for emergency cooking, lighting and heating. Get out of debt as much as possible.

But this brings up a serious question for Christians. In such times of disaster, should we, the people of God, merely try to survive? Should we try to gain from other people's losses? Jonah tried to escape what he thought was an unbearable situation, but in the end God used him to bring a great city to repentance. Elijah tried to survive the wickedness of Jezebel and Ahab and their corrupt government by fleeing to the desert. But God reprimanded him, and told him to get back in the thick of things and do his job. Peter's idea of survival was to go incognito and hide himself in the crowd. It didn't work and resulted in his shame and sorrow. Later he was to write, "Beloved think it not strange concerning the fiery trial among you, which comes upon you to prove you, as though a strange thing happened to you: but insomuch as you are partakers of Christ's suffering, rejoice; that at the revelation of his glory also you may rejoice with exceeding joy" (1 Pet. 4:12-13).

Jesus said that his disciples are the light and salt of the world. The light must shine where the darkness is found and the salt must be applied where the people are. It is in just such times of distress as the Y2K problem might create that a Christian may have the greatest influence upon family and neighbors, and demonstrate that God gives confidence, strength, and peace to those who trust Him.

On several occasions Jesus warned the disciples of perilous times to come, and admonished them to "watch." Speaking of the coming judgment on Jerusalem and the nation of Israel, Jesus said, "Take heed, watch and pray: for you know not when the time is" (Mark 13:33). Other admonitions to "watch" can be found in Matt. 24:42-46; 25:11-13; 26:38-41; 1 Cor. 16:13; 1 Thess. 5:2-10 and Rev. 3:2.

A study of these verses will reveal what it means to "watch." Certainly it doesn't mean to watch the stock market, or the criminal activities of world leaders, nor does it mean to watch for events in the state of Israel, as Christian/Zionists are doing.

To "watch" is to watch one's own actions, to be spiritually and mentally alert at all times, not just when one may expect Christ's return. In the parable of the ten virgins, "watch" meant to act wisely and make decisions with a view to the ultimate purpose: being ready to meet Jesus, the bridegroom.

In the parable of the talents, "watch:" meant to be faithful in serving the Master at all times, not wasting abilities, but putting all our resources to His use.

In the garden the night before his crucifixion, Jesus said to Peter, James and John, “My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death: abide here, and watch with me.” He returned to find them sleeping, and said to Peter, “What, could you not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray, that you enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak” (Matt. 26.36-41). If we are not vigilant we will fall into temptation.

When Paul met with the elders of the church at Ephesus, he warned them of wolves in the flock, drawing away the disciples after themselves, and told them to “watch” (Acts 20.29-31).

To the Corinthians he said “Watch, stand fast in the faith, be brave” be strong. Let all that you do be done in love” (1 Cor. 16:13). Here, as in other places, “watch” means to be conscious of your own obedience and faithfulness to the Lord.

To the Thessalonians Paul wrote. “Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober...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” (1 Thess. 5:2-10).

These admonitions were made at a time when the Roman Empire was in a state of turmoil leading up to God’s judgment on Israel, and the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD. Yet the Christians were urged to focus on their own spiritual condition. Those who are committed to Christ are living every day as though it were their last. They are seeking “first the kingdom of God and His righteousness,” and praying for wisdom and boldness to declare the gospel to others. They are not isolating themselves, but giving of themselves to bear one another’s burdens.

The question is not whether one survives, but whether or not one will be found faithful to the end. The world is reeling from man being out of harmony with the Creator, and a nation steeped in sin will reap the wages of its sin. Because of this, we may have to go through fiery trials, but we must let them purify us and not dim our faith, that all may see the light of faith and hope we have through Christ.

Therefore, we watch, not as the fearful and godless children of the world, but as children of God “and if children, then heirs: heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ: if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified with him” (Rom.8.17).

We are to watch, but not to worry. Computers are temporary, and like all other material things, they will pass away. Our joy and hope is in Christ’s promise: “Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee the crown of life” (Rev. 2:10).

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