

4.

GOD'S TIMETABLE

God has a timetable. He is not doing things randomly. Neither is He sort of ad-libbing as time goes along – seeing how things develop and then changing his plans accordingly. Instead, from the beginning, God has known exactly when and how each event will occur.

Unlike God who is infinite and not confined to time, we human beings are finite and are limited by both time and space. We cannot know the future unless God reveals it to us. We are entirely dependent upon Him.

In discussions regarding the end times or the end of this present age, there has been a lot of speculation through the years. Teachings, opinions, predictions and interpretations have abounded and still do abound. I know of no other area of Bible interpretation which is fraught with so much confusion, differing opinions and error as the subject of prophecies concerning the future.

Many of the mistakes which have been made in the past have been made because people interpreted the prophetic scriptures in the light of their contemporaneous events. They looked at the Bible through the lenses of their present sociopolitical situation. For example, many people during World War II thought that Hitler was the Antichrist. This is understandable. Certainly he was an evil person who persecuted the Jews.

Others have predicted the second coming of Christ. Perhaps some of you readers remember the brief furor created by a little book claiming that He was returning in 1988. None of these things have turned out to be true.

However, the ideas being presented here serve a good purpose. They are food for thought. If the man of sin is manifested in our time, then there are certain events which will have to occur to fulfill the scriptures.

These thoughts give the believer directions in which to look. If nothing happens as we have imagined, well and good. But if the very events, or events similar to what we have been discussing, begin to unfold then we will know that the time has come.

A DIVINE FORMULA

These things being said, God does reveal to us part of His timetable. He does give us a kind

of chronology of events to guide us. It is true that no one knows the day or the hour of Jesus' second advent (Mt 25:13). But, even though it is impossible to nail down exact dates for the coming events, we are given some general guidelines. God has not left us entirely in the dark. My favorite of these guidelines is the explanation given by Peter.

Peter was a fisherman. He was not an educated man. Yet, he became someone who was intimate with God and heard clearly from Him. While teaching us about the end of this age and Jesus' second coming he speaks about the problem of the coming skeptics.

He addresses those who, towards the end of the age, will be faced with many "scoffers...in the last days" who will say, "Where is the promise of his coming?" (II Pet 3:3,4). He asserts that they "willfully forget" how God has judged the earth before and will do so again (II Pet 3:5-7).

Then he urges his readers not to forget one thing. There is an important fact about this subject which he is very keen for them to remember. It is this: "...that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day" (II Pet 3:8). Here Peter is reminding them of God's timetable. It is something which the Lord has revealed to him and that he is urging them (and us) to remember.

Many seem to suppose that Peter is simply waxing poetic here. They imagine that he is

merely saying something like: "Oh, it's just going to be a long time." "Who knows how long." Or, "You never know. You never can tell with God, He's just so much beyond us."

But could this really be what Peter is so anxious for us to remember? Could this be his anointed response to all the skeptics? Is something so vague and wishy-washy what he really intended to communicate? Or could it be that Peter was actually explaining something concrete which he urgently wanted us to understand and remember?

What might happen if we took Peter's words literally? What if he is giving us a literal equation? Then we would have a simple, divinely inspired formula for the end of the age. This formula would be: one day = one thousand years. If we would apply this formula to the six days of creation and the seventh day of rest, we would arrive at the following idea: God designed from the beginning for this earth to exist for 6,000 years plus a 1,000 year millennium. This would give a total of 7,000 years, or seven "days."

Applying this formula in this manner is not stretching the scriptures beyond their context. Peter is talking here about "the beginning of creation" (vs 4), the heaven and earth which were created and the future judgment or end of the world. So it is very logical to apply his formula in this way. If we do so, then we would

expect the return of Christ to be about 6,000 years after the creation of Adam.

According to various Bible chronologers, we are very close to that date now. Many learned brethren have traced the often slender thread of dates through the Bible. They calculate their conclusions based on the ages of individuals, the reigns of kings and other numbers given in scriptures. Although no two seem to agree with one another exactly, they all arrive at approximately the same conclusion.

This is: that from the creation of Adam and Eve until God's covenant with Abraham was about 2,000 years, from Abraham to Christ was about 2,000 years. From Christ until today about 2,000 years. This last number is easy to figure. We can simply look at any modern calendar and find that about 2,000 years have passed since the birth of Christ.

Therefore, Peter's simple formula works just as we might expect. From the six days of creation until today, more or less 6,000 years have passed. So, we should be expecting the end of the age at any moment. However, we must remember that these dates are not exact.

Scholars argue, for example, over the precise date of Jesus' birth. Also, some of the Old Testament chronologers differ with each other by as much as 85 years. So we can only conclude that we are now *about* 6,000 years from the beginning.

Another factor which we might consider is that the crucifixion of Christ was much more of a pivotal date in world history than his birth. So if we were to count 2,000 years from the cross, rather than the manger (which would have been approximately 27 to 33 A.D.), then we would not expect Jesus to return until 2,027 to 2,033 A.D. This would put the second coming about 23 to 28 years from today. Such a rudimentary calculation is nothing to base your life on. But it does give us an idea of about where we might be on God's calendar.

TWO IMPORTANT EVENTS

One other thing we know clearly from the scriptures is that the "day" of the Lord's appearing will not come until two events occur. One of these is called a great "falling away" (II Thess 2:3). Literally, this means "defection" or "revolt." Incredibly, some Bible teachers have tried to make this into the rapture. They teach that this word can mean "departure." From this basis, they insist that Jesus will not come until the church has "departed."

It is interesting to note that the Greek word here is "APOSTASIA" which is literally translated "apostasy." Thus, we have the honor of being the only generation in the history of the church which has twisted the scriptures to such an extreme point. We have managed to convert

the greatest apostasy of all time into the rapture. But, getting back to our original thought, this great apostasy or departure from the true following of Jesus must occur first.

The second event is that the “man of sin” must be revealed (II Thess 2:3). This means that the Antichrist will be seen and known for what he is before the day of Jesus’ return. It is not clear from the word of God exactly when the Antichrist will be “revealed.” Some think it will be at the beginning of a seven year period known as the tribulation. Others speculate that it will be in the middle of this time, three and one half years before the end.

But there is no verse which demands either of these two interpretations. It is possible that the Beast will emerge in an identifiable manner many years before the events which will mark the beginning of the tribulation. We will probably be able to recognize the Antichrist by seeing him involved in the events which we are studying in this book. These things could occur a number of years before he consolidates his power or begins his persecution of the saints.

Our rough calculation above gave us 23 to 28 years until the end of the age. Subtracting 7 years of tribulation from this would give us 16 to 21 years from today. But, it will take some time for the Antichrist to establish his kingdom and consolidate his power. This will not happen overnight.

So, the Antichrist could be recognizable some years, let us say 10 to 15 years before the beginning of the tribulation. This could mean that very soon we may be able to identify someone who is beginning to fulfill the prophecies concerning this figure.

This timetable cannot be thought of as being exact, prophetic or dependable. Only the passage of time will tell us if our cogitations are correct. But these ideas do give us a direction in which to look. They are useful as some kind of point of reference to compare to current events. So, if we see things beginning to fall into place according to the scriptures which we have been examining, then we can know that the time is indeed short.

“THIS GENERATION”

Another passage which comes into play in our discussion is found in Luke chapter 21. Here Jesus is teaching His disciples about the signs of the times and the end of the age. As part of this dissertation He says: “Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all things are fulfilled” (Lk 21:32).

This verse has been the subject of much debate. Just what Jesus meant by “this generation” is often disputed. However, it seems clear that this must include the generation which sees certain signs. Among these signs is that

“...Jerusalem will be trampled by the Gentiles [remain in the possession of the Gentiles] until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled” (Lk 21:24).

In 70 A.D. the Roman general Titus conquered and destroyed Jerusalem. Beginning at that time until recently, it has been under “Gentile,” rather than Jewish domination. But in 1967 the the older, historic part of the city of Jerusalem fell into the hands of the Jews again, after almost 2,000 years had passed. This event is probably the fulfillment of the above mentioned pronouncement of Jesus.

This then would tell us that the end will be within one generation of this event. (Some have mistakenly begun their calculations from the time when Israel became a nation, ie. 1948. But the verse here specifically says “Jerusalem,” not Israel.)

But what is a biblical generation? There are verses which mention the figure 40 years. Other verses seem to say 100 years. Due to their sin, the children of Israel wandered in the wilderness until one generation died out. This took 40 years.

However, this group was all 20 years old or older when their rebellion took place (Num 14:29). So, some of this “generation” which died out could have reached 60 years of age or even more, depending on how old they were when they were cursed.

The 40 year figure in the Bible must mean that it takes forty years for one generation to generate or reproduce another generation. This does not mean that a generation is limited to 40 years. The exact words which we have read in Luke are “this generation will *by no means pass away.*” So the “generation” which has seen Jerusalem come back into the possession of the Jews would all have to die out in order for them to “pass away.” This would take roughly 70 years if we count the average life-span of modern man.

But remember here that this generation will *not* pass away. So we must be looking at a period of years which is less than this, let us say 60 years. If we would take our 1967 date and add 60 years, this would put us at 2027. This number dovetails very nicely with our calculations using Peter’s formula. Subtracting 7 years of tribulation, gives us 15 years from today.

You can no doubt see that there is a lot of guesswork involved in our mathematics here. These figures can by no means be thought of as exact. They only give us some ideas about what might take place. Therefore, the only reliable source we have to confide in is Jesus Christ. He is the One who will be showing us how the events of our day fit or do not fit into His plan. It is only if we are walking in intimacy with Him, that that day will not “come on you unexpectedly” (Lk 21:34).