

Rapture Predictions and the End of the World

False Prophecy and Christianized Astrology

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Since the birth of the church people have been predicting the day of Christ's return to earth. He Himself predicted His own return in Matthew's and Mark's Gospels, but He also made it clear that no one would or could know the day or hour of that apocalyptic event. *

The two-pronged question is *why* some people find it necessary to make such predictions and *why* such error is embraced by so many. The obvious answer is people love predictability when it comes to apocalyptic subjects—and people like to be *scared*. Jesus told His followers many times to *be ready* for the day of His return, which, some people seem to have been interpreted as a call from God to predict it. Jesus' command us to be ready, but it wasn't a mandate to predict an event that—*in His own words*—He said He didn't (and doesn't) know.

End-of-the-world predictions are sensational—and misguided individuals capitalize on such predictions, exploiting vast audiences of ignorant or gullible people who are eager to embrace them. This, in turn, brings notoriety, sells lots of books and massages pride. Moreover, when the Lord *doesn't* return as they predicted, they often reset the date, invent a scenario that preserves their integrity ("He *did* return, but it was a spiritual event invisible to humans,' etc.) or they unapologetically move on from the error as if they never made the prediction. The Bible calls such people *false* prophets. It even warns people not to listen to them.

The advent of social media like Facebook and YouTube, along with publishing houses willing to invest in such profitable Biblical speculations, have provided false prophets with huge audiences of conspiracy-devotees and the spiritually naïve. Recent best-selling Christian books, blogs and wide-reaching YouTube videos have fostered frenzied predictions of the rapture, the Great Tribulation, the Mark of the Beast and the imminent return of Christ—ascertained through the lens of modern westernized readings of Bible prophecy (mathematical equations, Bible codes, modern idioms, etc.). More troubling,

* Matthew 24:26, Mark 13:32

however, are the increasingly popular attempts to quantify Biblical prophecy using forms of Christianized *astrology*.

When interpreting Scripture and Bible prophecy, it's important to remember that prophets spoke using terms and idioms familiar to their audience. In other words, God isn't hiding His message, but *revealing* it to people in a manner simple enough for them to clearly understand Him. What people? Peasants—simple, non-abstracting folk who were largely illiterate and hardly theologians. In fact, the theological elite were the ones Jesus warned would overthink His message and ruin the meaning. When the *obvious* in the message is extrapolated through a modern lens, predictions of the end of the world can become outlandish.

This is what happened to Jewish theology in the centuries following the destruction of their Temple in AD 70. The Bible was (and remains) a Hebrew book. But when the remnant of Hebraic Jews was scattered by the Romans, they settled in mostly Hellenized regions of the Empire. Hebrew thinking had now radically evolved from Hebrew into Greek—interpreting Scripture with the same logic and thought processes as Greek pagans. This in turn infected the Mishna and Talmud—huge post-Temple reinterpretations of Scripture developed to compensate for the missing Temple and the sacrifices. This opened the door for all kinds of strange, mystical and mythical ideas to seep into Jewish theology. Take the Bet Alfa synagogue for instance...

Bet Alfa Synagogue in Israel was rediscovered when a construction crew cut into a huge mosaic synagogue floor. Archeologists dated the elaborate floor to late Roman times—after the inception of the Talmud. The floor's cartoonish images reveal how their interpretation of Scripture went badly wrong. The center of the floor is emblazoned with a large circle bearing the image of Helios, the sun-god surrounded by a complete array of zodiac signs, which is further framed by images of Biblical accounts. To date, archeologists have discovered seven Byzantine synagogues in Israel with similar pagan motifs—effigies of Zeus, Medusa and more, common throughout the Greco-Roman world. Here's why this is important...

To reinterpret prophecy and the painful conundrum of the loss of their Temple, the Jews sought answers not only in Scripture but in mysticism, including ‘signs’ in the heavens—what we call *astrology*. Of course, the Bible clearly speaks about signs in the heavens—so wouldn’t this be the same sort of thing? In a word, *no*.

In his zeal to make the imminent return of Christ more predictable, Scott Clark alleged that the ‘signs’ of the end described in Revelation 12 referred to the transit of planets through various constellations, thus telling the story of redemption, the second coming and the exact day of Christ’s birth.[†] But this idea is a gross misunderstanding of the distinct Old Testament imagery employed in the prophecies and the structure of the Book of Revelation. Clark’s path runs dangerously parallel with astrology, encouraging Christians to look to the stars to predict the future—like the pagan mystics and astrology.

The same could be said of John Hagee and his best-selling book, *Four Blood Moons*, in which he interprets typical lunar eclipses as end-times signs, or David Meade, who popularized the paranoid myth of the rogue planet (or star or asteroid) Nibiru, which was to come hurtling through the solar system by the end of 2017, wreaking havoc on the earth and ushering in the second coming. Obviously Nibiru never showed up.[‡]

Other problematic end-times literature of the past includes Jonathan Cahn’s *The Harbinger* (which misapplies God’s covenantal promises with Israel to America), books on Bible codes, *The Jupiter Effect*—a paranoid and ridiculous money-maker of the ‘70’s, Y2K and the related fear-mongers at the turn of the millennium, and so forth. People still love eschatological predictability and the adrenaline rush of conspiratorial fear.

Conclusion

[†] Tim McHyde said of Scotty Clark’s method of interpretation “Clarke’s theory, like all invented prophecy theories, depends on taking a verse out of its context and re-purposing it to serve some new theory. When you ignore the context of a verse, you are set up to misinterpret it. That’s how you turn a solid reliable Bible prophecy into an unreliable quasi-biblical man-made prophecy interpretation.”

[‡] *Nibiru* is a theoretical “Planet X” orbiting the sun at a tremendous distance, and, though minor gravitational perturbations affecting the orbits of the outer planets, including Pluto, have been detected, no large or threatening planetary body has been discovered. Further, Nibiru conspiracy theorists fail to recognize that a planetary or dark stellar object would take decades, if not centuries to fall into the sun’s gravity-well, and even then, it would need a considerable “push” from an even more massive object to leave its own orbit.

Jesus is coming—nothing can stop Him and *no one* can predict Him. He didn't say when because He didn't know when—He just said, "Soon". He was also explicit—even harsh—concerning people who presumed to predict the timing of His return. Like the *Four Blood Moons*, the Revelation 12 planetary alignment of 2017[§], Y2K and the all-but-forgotten Jupiter Effect were all non-events.

It is foolish, false and dangerously misleading to promote or acknowledge any person, 'prophet' or movement that sets dates for the second coming of Christ. The hermeneutic of such people amount to little more than medieval rabbinical mysticism and Christianized astrology. Jesus, in Revelation 2, threatened with damnation Christians who claimed to know 'God's deep secrets' and that such 'secrets' were actually from Satan. The signs of His coming are not *deep*—and they're never wrong.

On a personal note, concerning those who've become convinced of a 'date', I hope they're right. I look forward to the rapture and return of Christ. If they're wrong, I hope they repent—and that they remember to apologize to those they misled.

And to Jesus, too...

[§] Clark admitted he did his math 'incorrectly'