

Question: Almost every year as we approach New Year's Day, we hear more speculation about the second coming of Christ and the end of the world. What did Jesus really say about his return and the end?

Jesus made it clear that no one but God the Father knows the time for our Lord's return and the end of all things. He said, "No one knows about that day or hour, not even the Son, but only the Father" (Matthew 24:36). In spite of what Jesus said, we continue to have speculators who claim that we can at least know the century or decade if not the very year the world will end. But I can't imagine how Jesus could have made it any clearer that no one has even the faintest idea when the end will come.

A prime example of the complete failure of predictions about the coming of Christ and the end at the world is the speculation at the end of the last millennium and beginning of the new millennium (year 2000). The theory at that time was based on the assumption that creation took place at about 4000 B.C., making 2000 A.D. the beginning of the seventh millennium since the world began. If 1000 years is equal to one day with God, this would have been the seventh day, the day of rest. Thus, many speculated that at about the year 2000 Jesus would come, the battle of Armageddon would take place and Jesus would reign on earth for a thousand years.

However, this speculation was based on some very inaccurate calculations. Using Old Testament genealogies, Archbishop Ussher of England came up with the date of 4004 B.C. for the time of creation. Biblical scholars have long agreed that Ussher made numerous errors and failed to consider many gaps of unspecified lengths of time. Some have used the same genealogies and arrived at a date of 6000 B.C. for the time of creation. We also know that when the monk Dionysius worked out our present Christian calendar, dating all time from the birth of Jesus, he made an error of four to six years. By his calculations Herod the Great died in 4 B.C., but the Bible makes it clear that Herod was alive when Jesus was born. This means that 2000 year span actually ended sometime between 1994 to 1996. But obviously Jesus did not come nor did the world end in 2000.

Most recent speculation has centered around the supposed Mayan doomsday prediction for December 21, 2012. This failed prediction was based on the claim that the Mayan calendar ended with that date.

However, my limited research found that although the Mayans did not extend their calendar beyond this date they did not claim the world would end or that the apocalypse would come on any specific date. In fact, other Mayan writings indicate that they anticipated life beyond 2012.

Indeed, Jesus may return soon and bring an end to this present world. But the time remains totally unknown. It is in God's hands alone. The New Testament does view the coming of Jesus and the end as always near. God is timeless and what seems a long time for us is short for Him. According to the Bible, we have been in "the last days" since the first Christian century (Acts 2:14-16). This sense of the nearness of the end and yet of the uncertainty of the time was apparently intended to keep Christians always faithful and ready for the coming of Christ whenever that will be. One thing that IS certain and beyond question: Jesus will come. At his coming the world will be judged, and unrepentant sin will be punished. Those who have lived by faith in Christ will be invited to sit at the banquet table in the Kingdom where the Lord himself will serve them (Luke 12:35-48). Are YOU ready to see Jesus?

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