

Countdown to His Coming

Scripture Before Our Eyes

As earthquakes rock different parts of the world with more frequency, shocks and aftershocks run through the Church with each day's newscast. We can hold our daily newspaper beside the books of Daniel, Zechariah, Matthew, and Revelation, marveling at the foreknowledge and wisdom of God. We can also be thankful that we know Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, rejoicing that we will soon be delivered from Satan's rule in this Earth.

There are many teachers and prophets in the Church today who are telling you what to look for concerning the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. Some, claiming they have heard from God, are even declaring exact dates for certain events. As with many other predictions of the past, we can only wait and see. Many prophecies have been issued in the last few years concerning a worldwide revival before the Lord's coming. I believe these prophecies are valid, even though they cannot be found in the Bible. Historically, the Holy Spirit has moved in times and seasons, usually preparing the Body of Christ through dreams, prophecies, and visions for events to come.

For example, neither the outpouring at Azusa in the early 1900s, the Healing Movement of the 1940s and 1950s, nor the Charismatic Renewal of the 1960s and 1970s are foretold in the Word of God. However, they were significant historical times of the Church and genuine moves of God.

Nevertheless, in this article I want to bring you back to the Bible to see what God does have to say to us about the events of our day. What does He say in His Word are the milestones we can watch for, happenings which will warn us that the Rapture of the Church, the Tribulation, and the second advent of Jesus Christ are soon to take place?

Three World Focal Points

The Bible makes it clear that before the coming Tribulation, three regions of the world will begin to take center stage during the Church Age. These areas will not suddenly emerge after the Rapture of the Church, but will start to escalate into key players before the seven years of world catastrophe. Since their rise and growth are predicted by the Word of God, we can look to them now as time clocks, telling us how much closer we are to the coming of the Lord.

These three regions are Israel, Russia, and Western Europe, or the European Economic Community (EEC).

Israel

Now learn a parable of the fig tree; When his branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is nigh:

So likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors.

Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled.

Matthew 24:32-34

The generation Jesus was referring to was the generation which would see the fig tree begin to put forth leaves. That generation is ours! The fig tree is symbolic of Israel, and the Bible is saying that while it is still in its infancy, tender and growing, it will begin to put forth leaves. The leaves indicate economic and political prosperity.

We have seen those leaves spring forth in the last few decades. Not long after becoming a state in 1948, Israel developed into a world power. This little nation has survived attack after attack and won several wars. It has become a tremendous economic force in the world, sending its goods and services to many nations.

Jesus' words in Matthew also tell us that when the leaves appear, it is an indication that summer is near. Summer represents the millennial reign of the Lord Jesus. From this passage, we can conclude that we are getting very close to summer!

These verses come at the end of a chapter in which Jesus has told of the Tribulation, the rise of Antichrist, and His second advent to come. He informs His disciples that the generation which would see the fig leaves come forth would be the generation when all of these things would come to pass.

At this moment, Israel is working diligently toward a peace agreement with the PLO and other Arab neighbors who have been its enemies for centuries. This peace is absolutely critical to set the stage for the coming time of world troubles, the Tribulation.

Ezekiel chapters 38 and 39 tell us of a time when Israel will be attacked by Russia. The war will occur in an unprecedented time of peace in Israel, as the Russian armies will invade a land of "unwalled villages" with people "at rest," having "neither bars nor gates" (Ezekiel 38:11).

Through its pursuit of peace with the Arab nations, Israel is moving itself into position for this Bible prophecy to come to pass. This time of false peace will cause the great Jewish military machine to lay down its defenses. Then the leaders of Russia will not think twice about attacking Israel.

Although the war will be supernaturally won by Israel, fear over the future will change Israel's strategy. After this war, Israel will look for a strong ally for protection. It will turn to Europe, which the Book of Daniel calls the revived Roman Empire. Therefore, it is also very significant that Israel is now working on a financial agreement with the EEC and a peace initiative with the Vatican, a fierce enemy for centuries.

Russia

Although the former Soviet Union has opened its doors to freedom, western capitalism, and the Gospel of Jesus Christ, these doors will be shut in the near future. Even now, the doors are beginning to close. This window of time was necessary for Bible prophecy to come to pass. Not only did God use this time to bring the Gospel to this area of the world, but as this bankrupt nation gains western money and expertise, it will regain the power and the ability it needs to attack Israel.

The former Soviet Union is not dead, yet its problems are far from over. Due to the geographical location of the entire country, it is too far North to have any consistent growing season for crops. For decades, it has depended heavily on foreign countries for its food supply. The need for basic necessities has never been greater than at this present time.

Israel, on the other hand, is the breadbasket for all of Europe. The crops grown there are the biggest and best on earth. Israeli crops are on the tables of homes and restaurants around the world. Therefore, the Russian leadership is developing a great desire to possess this small, fruitful nation.

Vladimir Zhirinovsky, a flagrant anti-Semite who is presently the frontrunner for president of Russia in the 1996 election, has already stated, "...the United States has South America, Europe has Africa, and the Soviet Union will have the Middle East."

Plans have been in place for years for Russia to obtain Israel, but God knew these plans from eternity past and has a surprise waiting for the Soviets! Although they will attack in mass and military might, they will not win. The Bible declares that this battle will be won supernaturally by Israel, and more than 80 percent of the Russian army will be destroyed. The Word of God prophesies it will take Israel seven months to bury the dead and seven years to consume the spoils from that war (Ezekiel 39:9,12)!

It is my personal belief that the Church will see this battle just before we are removed by way of the Rapture.

Europe

Today, it is easy to recognize that the world's center of political power and economic strategy is moving toward the EEC. This confederation of 12 nations has recently been united to consolidate the immense wealth of formerly independent countries. The Church can look for a greater shift of the world's investments and business power to this area of the world in the days to come.

Daniel chapters 2 and 7 tell us that this area, the Roman Empire of the past, will drop to 10 nations, and a leader will arise to control it. The Scriptures describe him as Satan's counterfeit of the Lord Jesus Christ, and thus he is referred to as the "Antichrist."

As in the days when Jesus was crucified, this revived Roman Empire, the EEC, will again dominate Israel under the leadership of Antichrist. What will mark the beginning of the Tribulation is the seven-year peace treaty he will draw up with Israel, an agreement he will break after three and a half years.

In Jesus' day, Rome destroyed Jerusalem and the Temple. In our generation, the EEC, under the Antichrist's rule, will also attempt to permanently erase the Jewish capital and its people. Rome was successful in A.D. 70, but revived Rome's attempt will fail at the Battle of Armageddon, when Jesus will return, destroy Antichrist and his forces, and bring us into His millennial reign.

The relationship between Europe and Israel has already begun, primarily because its relationship with the United States, its greatest support and ally in the past, has suffered in the last few years. Israel was against the reelection of President Bush. It felt betrayed when his administration refused it loan guarantees, and it wanted the United States to stop interfering with its internal affairs. With the election of President Clinton, the United States has turned further away from Israel and concentrated more on domestic affairs.

However, when Israel and the PLO were going to sign a peace treaty, President Clinton jumped right in, and the signing took place at the White House. Interesting enough, he invited nations who wished to contribute money to the new Mideast alliance to come to Washington, D.C. Forty nations came to contribute money, and the largest contributor was the EEC. Israel has found a new ally.

We have also recently witnessed the uniting of two longtime enemies, Israel and the Vatican. Hundreds of years of fighting seem to have been settled with another treaty. Israel now has stronger ties than ever before with Europe and its main religious system.

Look Up!

Herein is our love made perfect [matured], that we may have boldness [confidence] in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in the world.

1 John 4:17

God is confident about the future as He looks down from heaven and observes current events. He knows everything is going according to His plan in these last days. The question is, "Do you know that?"

Does all of this excite you or scare you? Do you have confidence about the day of judgment? If you don't, you can. Confidence about that day begins with a personal, relationship With Jesus today, and it will be strengthened in the days to come by the study and application of God's Word.

You are in the generation which is witnessing the blooming of the fig tree and the coming of summer. The Bible tells us that believers who will go to heaven by way of the Rapture of the Church will see the second advent from Jesus' side, returning with Him in all His glory (Revelation 19:11-14). What an exciting time to look forward to!

With an understanding of passages of Scripture like these, you can be as steadfast, confident, and assured on Earth as God is in heaven. As you learn and apply God's Word in your life, you will discover a peace-filled assurance in a world filled with chaos and instability. You can say with Jesus, "Although I hear of wars, rumors of wars, pestilence, and earthquakes, I will not be troubled!"

