

Jesus Predicted a First-Century Return

Copyright © 2008 by Michael A. Fenemore

Revised: 2008 Oct 20

Jesus did not know the “day and hour” of his return (Matt. 24:36). However, he knew it would take place before his generation had expired. This clearly precludes a delay spanning two millennia or even a single century.

Matt. 10:23

Jesus instructed his disciples to hurry because the time for preaching before his return was relatively short:

...whenever they persecute you in one city, flee to the next; for truly I say to you, *you will not finish going through the cities of Israel until the Son of Man comes.* (Matt. 10:23, NASB throughout unless otherwise noted.)

This emphatic statement leaves no room for an enormous delay. It would certainly not have taken thousands of years to reach the cities of Israel. Moreover, most of those cities were destroyed by A.D. 70. So Christ’s return must have occurred by that time.

Matt. 16:27-28

Jesus knew the approximate time of his return and the judgment. He guaranteed they would occur within the lifetime of his contemporaries:

²⁷“For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and WILL THEN REPAY EVERY MAN ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS. ²⁸“Truly I say to you, *there are some of those who are standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom.*” (Matt. 16:27-28)¹

Matt. 24:33-34

Responding to questions regarding signs to precede the destruction of the temple (Matt. 24:3), Jesus emphatically declared the entire Olivet Prophecy would be fulfilled before his generation had passed:

¹ The NASB, which incorporates boldface verse numbers to denote new paragraphs, inserts a break at verse 28. However, the NA/UBS *Greek New Testament*, on which the NASB is based, does not.

³³...when you see all these things, *recognize that He is near, right at the door.* ³⁴Truly I say to you, *this generation will not pass away until all these things take place.* (Matt. 24:33-34)

The very disciples to whom Jesus was speaking would see “all these things.” They were to regard them as signs that Jesus was “right at the door.” The temple was destroyed in A.D. 70. Therefore, the rest of “these things” must have taken place about the same time. They included the preaching of the gospel to “the whole world” (v. 14), “the ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION” (v. 15), “the SON OF MAN COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF THE SKY” (v. 30), and the gathering of the “elect” (v. 31).

Luke 21:22, 28, 31

Luke’s account of the Olivet Discourse reveals that all Old Testament prophecy was to be fulfilled about the time of the temple’s destruction. The resurrection, rapture, and arrival of the kingdom of God were predicted to coincide with that catastrophe:

...these are days of vengeance, so that *all things which are written will be fulfilled.* (Luke 21:22); ...when these things *begin* to take place, straighten up and lift up your heads, because *your redemption is drawing near.* (v. 28); ...when you see these things happening, recognize that *the kingdom of God is near.* (v. 31)

Rev. 1:3; 22:10

“The Revelation of Jesus Christ” (Rev. 1:1) promised the persecuted first-century Christians that the fulfillment of the events described therein was “near”:

...*the time is near* (Rev. 1:3); Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for *the time is near.* (ch. 22:10)

Conclusion

Clearly, Jesus did predict a first-century return.

Jesus Predicted a First-Century Return

Copyright © 2008 by Michael A. Fenemore

Revised: 2008 Oct 20

Objections

Objection: Most commentators say Matt. 16:28 refers to the transfiguration which is described in the following chapter.

Answer: Matt. 16:28 does not refer to the transfiguration. Please read *Did the Transfiguration Fulfill Matt. 16:28?*

Objection: You have applied “this generation” in Matt. 24:34 to the first century. Most modern prophecy teachers interpret this differently. Some say it refers to the generation alive at the time of Christ’s future return. Others say the Greek word γενεά (*genea*) can mean *race*, suggesting the Jewish race will still be in existence when Jesus returns.

Answer: All such opinions are presumptuous and irrelevant. The only interpretation worthy of consideration is the one taught in Holy Scripture by Christ’s “holy apostles” (Eph. 3:5) who together with the prophets are the foundation of the church of God (Eph. 2:19b-20; Rev. 21:14). Without exception, *they* understood Christ’s predictions to mean the return of Christ and all related events would occur within their lifetime; their generation. *The Holy Spirit inspired this interpretation!* Those who teach any other interpretation attack the very foundation of the church, deny the work of the Holy Spirit, and according to Jesus and Paul, could be in danger of eternal condemnation (Mark 3:28-29; Gal. 1:8-9, 12). Please read *Did the Apostles Predict a First-Century Return of Christ?*

Objection: You suggest the gospel was preached to the whole world by A.D. 70. That is impossible.

Answer: Actually, it was preached to the whole world by A.D. 57. Please read *Was the Gospel Preached to the Whole World?*

Objection: In your comment regarding Luke 21:28, you suggest the disciples’ “redemption” refers to the rapture. However, it could simply be referring to their protection from events related to the Jewish war with the Romans.

Answer: First-century Christians were expecting to see Jesus appear out of a cloud “just the same way” he disappeared *into* a cloud at his ascension (Acts 1:9-11). The instruction to “lift up your heads,” i.e., look upward, points to the rapture; the day when they would be “changed” (1 Cor. 15:51) having their bodies transformed to be like Christ’s glorious body

(Phil. 3:21). The Greek word ἀπολύτρωσις (*apolutrosis*) used here for “redemption” is the same word Paul used in Rom. 8:23 when he spoke of “the redemption of our body.” He employed it again in Eph. 4:30 referring to “the day of redemption.” It’s doubtful anyone would argue this phrase refers to protection from the war. In other places, ἀπολύτρωσις always refers to releasing or setting free. It never means protection. Luke 21:28 foresees first-century Christians being set free from their physical bodies. By tying the redemption of first-century Christians to his vengeance on the Jews, Jesus was simply reiterating Isaiah’s prophecy:

¹The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me,
Because the Lord has anointed me...

To proclaim liberty to captives

And freedom to prisoners;

²To proclaim the favorable year of the Lord

And the day of vengeance of our God;

To comfort all who mourn (Isa. 61:1-2)

For the day of *vengeance* was in My heart,

And My year of *redemption* has come. (Isa. 63:4)

This does not refer exclusively to the resurrection of the dead. Christ’s promise in Luke 21:28 referred to living Christians watching and waiting for his return. If the first-century Christians were not raptured at the destruction of Jerusalem, then they were not redeemed as promised.

Objection: Granted, Rev. 1:3 and 22:10 say, “the time is near.” However, this phrase should not be taken literally. Peter said, “with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day.” (2 Pet. 3:8).

Answer: Over 600 years before Revelation was written, Daniel’s vision was sealed because the events predicted would not occur for a long time: “these words are concealed and sealed up until the end time” (Dan. 12:9). However, in Revelation, the prophecy was *not* sealed because the time was near. Such a clear and straightforward use of figurative seals to signify the timing of these predictions cannot justifiably be obfuscated by 2 Pet. 3:8. The obvious symbolism would be rendered meaningless (sealed means a long time; unsealed means a short time). The thousand-year hypothesis sounds appealing only to futurists desperate to neutralize Rev. 1:3 and 22:10.

Jesus Predicted a First-Century Return

Copyright © 2008 by Michael A. Fenemore

Revised: 2008 Oct 20

Objection: Granted, Jesus predicted a first-century return. However, C. S. Lewis, arguably the greatest Christian author of the 20th century, concluded Jesus was wrong: “He clearly knew no more about the end of the world than anyone else.”²

Answer: Lewis took this preposterous position because, although he was honest enough to admit a first-century return was predicted, he evidently failed to consider the possibility it may have actually come to pass.

Under the Old Covenant, anyone making false predictions in the name of God was to be executed:

²⁰“...the prophet who speaks a word presumptuously in My name which I have not commanded him to speak, or which he speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die.”²¹“You may say in your heart, ‘How will we know the word which the Lord has not spoken?’”²²“When a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord, if the thing does not come about or come true, that is the thing which the Lord has not spoken. The prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him. (Deut. 18:20-22)

At least three times, Jesus prefaced a prediction of a first-century return with the emphatic phrase “Truly, I say to you” (Matt. 10:23; 16:28; 24:34). If he was wrong, he was a false prophet worthy of death. Lewis unwittingly created justification for Christ’s crucifixion.

Jeremiah reaffirmed the criterion by which a prophet should be validated:

Only when his predictions come true can we know that he is really from the LORD. (Jer. 28:9b, NLT)

Jeremiah was referring to the false prophet Hananiah who was killed by God for making a time-restricted false prediction (Jer. 28:1-17).

Ezekiel condemned false prophets:

Thus says the Lord GOD, “Woe to the foolish prophets who are following their own spirit and have seen nothing.” (Ezek. 13:3)

Zechariah strongly condemned false prophets:

...his own father and mother will tell him, ‘You must die, for you have prophesied lies in the name of the

LORD.’ And as he prophesies, his own father and mother will stab him. (Zech. 13:3b, NLT)

God insures predictions made by *his* prophets do not fail:

Samuel grew and the Lord was with him *and let none of his words fail.* (1 Sam. 3:19); Behold now, there is a man of God in this city [Samuel], and the man is held in honor; *all that he says surely comes true.* (ch. 9:6)

²⁴This is what the LORD says...“I am the LORD... ²⁵*I expose the false prophets as liars...* I cause the wise to give bad advice, thus proving them to be fools. ²⁶*But I carry out the predictions of my prophets!*” (Isa. 44:24-26, NLT)

If Christ’s predictions failed so abysmally in the first century, why would any sensible person trust him for a future fulfillment — or salvation?

There is only one acceptable conclusion: Jesus was right. Otherwise, he was a false prophet to be counted with the “liars” and “fools” deserving execution. If he was wrong, we Christians are wasting our time studying his unreliable predictions in the supposed “inerrant” or “infallible” Word of God.

All scripture referring to end-time events must relate to the persecution of Christians under Nero, the Roman civil war, and the Jewish revolt against Rome (A.D. 64-70) which culminated in the destruction of the temple and the end of animal sacrifices. The promised return of Christ, resurrection, rapture, and judgment must have occurred during that period. The interpretation of every difficult prophetic passage must be consistent with this premise. Please read *Timeline: The Great Tribulation*.

Download this article in PDF format at
<http://www.Preterism.info>

Scripture quotations marked NASB are taken from the *New American Standard Bible*®, copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.

Scripture quotations marked NLT are taken from the *Holy Bible, New Living Translation*, copyright © 1996, 2004. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Wheaton, Illinois 60189. All rights reserved.

² C. S. Lewis, *The World’s Last Night and Other Essays* (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1973), 98.