

UPC Prophecy Fails

On June 5, 1995, the Metro section of the the Commercial Appeal, Memphis, TN, carried an article by religion editor David Waters. It featured the members of the First United Pentecostal Church of Memphis. The focus of the article was the Pentecostals belief that history would end with the Second Coming. Further, they believed their movement fulfills Biblical Prophecies of a religious revival before the end of the world.

Based on this belief, the Pentecostals ran a half-page invitation sponsored by 13 area United Pentecostal churches. They also ran similar ads across the country. In addition, more newspaper and radio ads were part of a larger effort to ignite "a massive end-time revival."

This "massive end-time revival" was fueled by the belief of many Pentecostals that there were only 5 years left until the second coming of Christ. The Commercial appeal stated, "Many Pentecostals believe there are only five years until His Second Coming and the end of the world."

The following quote by a Pentecostal minister highlighted this imminent claim. "If there's ever been a time for revival," Rev. Sharp said, "'now is the time.'" That was almost 10 years ago! History continues! The end of this physical world has not occurred. What has become of this imminent Second Coming imagined by the Pentecostal Church and dated on or about June 2000?

The Pentecostal Church claims they are baptized with the Holy Spirit, that they receive revelations directly from God. How then could God be so wrong or so wrongly mislead them? Could it be that the problem is not with God, but with the United Pentecostal Church for believing and publicly propagating these false claims?

If there is one area of the Bible where Christians have made such a mockery of its teachings, it is that of the Second Coming of Christ and it's attendant events, i.e. the end of the "world," the resurrection and judgment. This is unnecessary and certainly it is not God's fault. In fact, God has given ample testimony concerning the Second Coming of Christ and the end of the world. It is unfortunate that rational minded Christians or anyone, should miss the simplicity of this event nor the time of its occurrence.

The problem with understanding the time of the Second Coming of Christ is not unique to the UPC. Even non-Christians, Muslims for example have made an issue of this so-called failed prophecy of the Bible. They are very quick to assert that Jesus failed in his predictions, and thus cannot be the inspired Son of God and thus Christianity is a false religion.

Several years ago, an article by Muslim, Jabril Muhammad appearing in the "Final Call" Newspaper, attacked Christianity on the basis of Jesus' failed predictions of an imminent return and end of the material universe. Their premise is sound and even Bible based.

It was Moses, God's own prophet who said, "And if you say in your heart, 'How shall we know the word which the Lord has not spoken?'—when a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord, if the thing does not happen or come to pass, that is the thing which the Lord has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him." (Deut. 18:21, 22).

That statement applies equally to Jesus as it does to the United Pentecostal Church. If Jesus made a false prediction about his coming, then he is a false prophet. If the UPC

prophesied falsely about the time of the Lord's return they prophesied falsely concerning that event.

Lest one think the above statements are radical, even respected names have attributed falsehood to Christ about His predictions concerning the end time. C.S. Lewis, a respected apologist and author said in 1960:

"Say what you like,' we shall be told [by the skeptic], "the apocalyptic beliefs of the first Christians have been proved to be false. It is clear from the New Testament that they all expected the Second Coming in their own lifetime. And worse still, they had a reason, and one which you will find very embarrassing. Their Master had told them so. He shared, and indeed created, their delusion. He said in so many words, 'this generation shall not pass till all these things be done.'" And He was wrong. He clearly knew no more about the end of the world than anyone else." (C.S. Lewis essay, "The World's Last Night, 1960, quoted in *Dead in Their Tracks* by John Noe.

In other words, C.S. Lewis saw no problem with calling Jesus a liar and deluder of disciples while believing him to be the Divine Savior at the same time, mainly because of his assumption that Jesus' prophecies failed. He joins the company of 19th century liberal, Albert Schweitzer, in his 19th-century book *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*. Schweitzer summarized the problem of Parousia delay" as follows:

The whole of 'Christianity' down to the present day...is based on the delay of the Parousia, the nonoccurrence of the Parousia, the abandonment of eschatology, the process and completion of the 'de-eschatologizing' of religion which has connected therewith.

Atheist Bertrand Russell, in his book, *Why I Am not A Christian*, discredits the inspiration of the New Testament. Russell was concerned with Christ as he appeared in the gospels because of his predictions of an imminent coming before the death of people who were living at that time. He argued that this was the belief of Jesus' earlier followers and was the basis of much of his moral teaching. Russell concluded that it would be fallacious to follow a religious leader who was mistaken on so basic a prediction as his parousia.

These men are not to be faulted in their assessment of what constitutes a true prophet. They are simply agreeing with the Scriptures in the words of Moses. Those who practice Judaism also are not exempt from making this claim.

Many Jewish skeptics believe that Jesus invented the doctrine of the Second Coming because they believe he failed to fulfill many Old Testament predictions. In response to the question about how the passage of time affects the doctrine of the second coming, Jewish Skeptics write: "Time makes the Christian doctrine of a "second coming of Christ" lose all credibility. If Jesus promised to come back shortly and the disciples expected so strongly to see Jesus return and establish the kingdom of God and neither event occurred, for what can the church still hope? In essence, Christian theological speculations on the "second coming of Christ" represent nothing more than the systemization of a mistake."
<http://www.jewsforjudaism.org/web/faq/faq116.html>

Thus, we have representatives from Christianity, Muslims, Judaism and Atheists, all agreeing on the same thing, that Jesus was mistaken, his prophecies failed, the New Testament is uninspired and the Second Coming did not occur as expected. For corroboration, they could cite the relatively recent failure of the United Pentecostal Church's failure to make good on their prophecy.

So, how can the failed prediction of the UPC provide such a revival when such a wide audience who understands the issue and its relevance to Scripture regard that very failure

as the reason not to follow Jesus or the Bible? It is my opinion that a paradigm of failure fails to motivate and inspire anyone to follow Jesus.

How do we address this issue? Are we even willing to address it? Or do we take a "head-in-the-sand" approach and ignore it? Christians ought to want the integrity of Christ and the scriptures upheld. They ought to believe their own Bible which says that God cannot lie, (Titus 1:2) and that it is impossible for God to lie." (Heb. 6:18). Compare these scriptures with the statements above and it should be clear that someone does not believe Jesus or the Bible on these matters. They even say so!

The questions we must answer is what did Jesus really say about His Second Coming and are we willing to accept and understand his words by faith? After all, isn't that what the Scriptures demand of us? "So then faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God." (Rom. 10:17). "But without faith it is impossible to please him..." (Heb. 11:6).

When we examine the words of Jesus, we learn that He taught and expected His return to occur within the first century generation and before some who were then alive died. The proposition is really quite simple. "For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then he will reward each according to his works. Assuredly I say to you, there are some standing here who shall not taste death till they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom." (Matt. 16:27, 28).

Later, Jesus gave a rendering of this same teaching in the Olivet discourse, "Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place." (Matthew 24:34). Included in "all these things" was the destruction of the Jewish temple by the Romans in A.D. 70, the end of the world (Jewish age) and the Parousia, (Presence or Second Coming of Christ). See Matthew 24:3, 29, Lk. 21:20-22.

Resolving Communication Difficulties in Scripture

Jesus often spoke in terms or parables that were misunderstood by the recipients until he explained it to them, (Matt. 13:13, 34, 35). For example, when speaking to Nicodemus, Jesus said that a man must be born again. Nicodemus picked up on the words "man" and "born again" and immediately associated them based on his own background and understanding of those terms. He could not possibly understand how a *man* could enter the second time into his mother's womb and be born." (John 3:3, 4).

What was the problem? Was Jesus lying to Nicodemus? Or was it a failure to understand that Jesus spoke of a different kind of birth than what Nicodemus had in mind? I would think most would agree that Jesus spoke of a "spiritual birth," —a real birth nevertheless but not of a physical kind detectable by natural eyesight. His explanation showed that he did not have in mind Nicodemus' idea of natural rebirth.

Rather, he spoke of being born of water and of the Spirit, showing a clear contrast with that birth, versus what Nicodemus experienced as an infant. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Later he explained its invisible nature, (John 3:8). Thus to understand Christ, we must be willing to look within both the natural and spiritual spheres, else much of his teachings would make no sense whatsoever and could be styled as false, impossible or ridiculous.

Secondly, Jesus claimed to be the "Bread of Life" sent down from heaven. "Most assuredly I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day." (John 6:53, 54).

His disciples were highly offended at this "obvious" reference to cannibalism and the law-forbidden act of eating blood. (Lev. 17:14; Acts 15:29). Eating blood was tantamount to excommunication from Judaism and loss of the inheritance. This statement was so radical, (understood in a literal or biological sense) that the multitude of disciples who followed Jesus confessed that it was a "hard saying; and asked, Who can understand it?"

At least they gave lip service to a desire to understand what seemed to be such a violation of the law and logical contradiction. Who could follow a Messiah that advocates eating flesh and blood?" Jesus asked, "Does this offend you?" He then explained that the "flesh" profited nothing, and that it was the words (implying faith and obedience) that produced life. (John 6:60-63)

Peter and the twelve refusing to turn away from Jesus accepted his explanation in the reply. "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life." (John 6:68). Thus, when we understand Jesus to speak of spiritually feasting upon him through faith and obedience to God, the statement is at once understandable, acceptable and without offense.

A third event which challenged the Jews was Jesus' statement in John 8:51. "Most assuredly, I say to you, if anyone keeps My word he shall never see death." The Jews reasoned on this statement like those who reject Jesus' doctrine on the second coming. "Then the Jews said to Him, 'Now we know that You have a demon! [are a false Messiah] Abraham is dead, and the prophets; and You say, 'If anyone keeps My word he shall never taste death.'" Are you greater than our father Abraham, who is dead? And the prophets are dead. Who do you make Yourself out to be?" (John 8:52, 53).

The Jews reasoned that Abraham was faithful to God. He obeyed God, yet he died. The prophets likewise were faithful and died. How then could he claim that faithful people would never die? Their minds, like Nicodemus and the disciples following Jesus for bread, was focused on the physical realm. Jesus spoke of spiritual death, that he would abolish through his death on the cross, (2 Tim. 1:10). Otherwise, the Jews would be correct in claiming that Jesus was a false prophet. However, when we understand that he speaks of spiritual death (separation from God) through sin, and its elimination through the shedding of his blood, we immediately eliminate the "apparent" problem.

The Kingdom Comes Without Observation

Hopefully, we are beginning to see that not all of Jesus' teachings were about things in the material world and visible to the natural eye. In fact, some of the Pharisees who expected an immediate appearance of the kingdom were shocked to learn that the kingdom would not come in a manner visible to human eyes.

"Now when He was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, he answered them and said, "The kingdom of God does not come with observation; nor will they say, "See here! Or 'See there!' For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you." (Luke 17:20, 21).

Jesus never taught that the coming of the Kingdom would be visible to the eyes of man. It is futile to look for an outward kingdom as such. His kingdom is not of this world, (John 18:36). It is in the world but not of the world. It's nature is spiritual, not physical and material. "For the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit." (Rom. 14:17)

Now, when we reexamine Jesus' statements about coming as the Son of Man in his kingdom, we must keep Luke 17:20, 21 in mind. It is a spiritual kingdom, like the new birth, like the "Bread of Life" and like the life which eradicates spiritual death.

Remember that Jesus told Nicodemus that unless a man was born again, he could not see the kingdom of God. That means that the kingdom of God is not seen in the physical realm. It is only seen in the spiritual realm because it is spiritual. We must see it with our *eyes of understanding*, (Eph. 1:18). It means that those who do not obey God will never "see" it.

Jesus stated that his return would only be perceived by believers. However, the key here is "how" he says he would be seen upon his return. "A little while longer and the world will see me no more, but you will see Me. Because I live, you will live also. At that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me and I in you. He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him." (John 14:19-21).

Jesus affirms that he would "manifest" or reveal himself to those who kept his commandments and loved him. This is how he is revealed in His Second Coming. As long as Christians and the world look for him to appear in literal clouds of the sky, they will continue to falsely prophecy his return and labor under the delusion that Jesus is a liar.

Resolving The Time Problem

Jesus promised that he would return within the lifetime of the first century disciples. We have shown that when giving these words a physical import, they cannot possibly be true. We all agree that the physical world did not end within the first century. However, unlike those who call Jesus a liar, I and many others, even some affiliated with the Pentecostal Church agree that Jesus returned when and as he said he would, —*before that first century generation passed*.

The expectation of nearness found throughout the apostolic writings is precisely accurate, though it does not fit with futuristic expectations and apocalyptic speculations. Many scriptures affirm the imminent expectation of the Lord's return as being at hand, having drawn near and shortly to come to pass within the first century. (Matthew 16:27, 28; 24:34; Rom. 13:11, 12; 16:20; 1 Cor. 1:7, 8; 7:31; 10:11; Phil. 4:5; Heb. 10:37; James 5:7, 9; 1 Pet. 4:7, 17; 1 John 2:18; Rev. 1:13, 22:6, 10, 12).

The End of the World

The "end of the world" when speaking of this material world, is also a concept foreign to the Bible and the words of Jesus. Yes, he taught about the end of the "world" but the words are more properly understood as the end or *consummation of the age*. He uses the word "aeon" in Matthew 24:3 to speak of the end of the Jewish age, an event which occurred with the destruction of the Jewish temple by Titus, general of the Roman army in the A.D. 70 invasion of Judea and demise of Jerusalem.

Jesus also placed his death in the end of the Jewish age, (Heb. 9:26) and within the first century generation, (Matt. 12:38-40). This cannot possibly be construed to mean the end of the material world.

The apostles so understood this language to refer to the end of their age, not an end of the material universe. "Now all these things happened to them as examples and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come." (1 Cor. 10:31).

The end of the age had come upon the first century disciples. This accords with Jesus' prophecy. Elsewhere the Bible teaches that the material world has no end. "One generation passes away and another generation comes; but the earth abides forever." (Eccl. 1:4). Unto him be glory in the church throughout all ages, world without end amen. (KJV, Eph. 3:21). See also Gen. 8:20, 21; Psa. 148: 4-6.

The failure to understand apocalyptic and metaphorical language has led many endtime exegetes into inexcusable error. It has dishonored Christianity in the process and is a great cause for unbelief, skepticism and ridicule of Jesus and the integrity of Scripture.

Where's The Apology?

What has become of this belief of the United Pentecostal Church and their end of the world revival motif? What should we do now that their prediction has embarrassed Christianity once again, and given more fuel to the skeptics, atheists and unbelievers? What do they now believe about the Second Coming of Christ? Do they believe Jesus is a liar like others before them or is there some rational explanation for this recent failure to perform as they thought he would?

Not long ago, the Jehovah's Witnesses backed down from their claim that the end was near in a widely distributed article published in Newsweek magazine, November 1995 issue. Apparently the Pentecostals ignored it. The witnesses believed that 1914 began the countdown to Armageddon and are famous for their statement, "Millions now living will never die." Well, we are 9 years away from it being a century since that claim was made. How many centenarians are among the Jehovah's Witnesses, especially since they have been known to refuse medical treatments involving blood transfusions? Many of those millions living in 1914 are now dead or soon to die.

Their claims were so strong that the end was near that they refused to fight in wars, buy life insurance, save money or accept medical treatment. On top of that, they renounced their claim for an imminent end just 4 years short of the year 2000, the very year the UPC claimed Christ would return. They yet believe the end is near, but from past embarrassment refuse to put a date on it.

It is my opinion that many of the religious groups were sadly disappointed that the year 2000 came without even a spark of the end of the world. There was more buzz about Y2K and the computer clocks than Jesus' second coming. All the date-setters were no doubt singing "Whispering Hope" in "so-low" fashion.

Growing Number of Believers Teach Second Coming is Past

Today, in stark contrast to last century's failed futuristic predictions, a growing number of those professing Christianity believe that Jesus returned as he said he would in the first century. They are generally referred to as Preterists, (meaning past) though some see the term as negative.

In general it refers to those who see the second coming and all Bible prophecy as a past first century event. They are from all denominational backgrounds, though much of the earlier studies of the last 35 years came from ministers in the Churches of Christ. Since that time, there has been a continual swell in both the interest and teachings that Jesus has returned.

Many are breathing a sigh of relief from the pandemonium caused by failed prophets/prophecies and are now seeing that the Bible can be trusted as truly inspired. Many complex passages are now clearly understood once the time framework is in place. Obscure passage now fit together like a puzzle.

Further study can be done such as the following:

There are many books and resources available and the literature continues to grow at a rapid pace. For more information visit: www.allthingsfulfilled.com or send email to: info:@allthingsfulfilled.com Listen to the "All Things Fulfilled" Radio Broadcast Sundays,

3:30-4:00 p.m. on WAVN, AM 1240. William Bell is a minister and author of several booklets, tracts and audio and video media on the subject of fulfilled Bible prophecy.