



"You can't do anything about the length of your life, but you can do something about its width and depth."
—H.L. Mencken

20-Jul-07

Our End Time

As we trudge relentlessly into the time of the end, and the bright summer days continue to be spiritually dark, we frequently cast about for any indicator of how much longer it will be until [Jesus Christ](#) returns, bringing the mad rule of man to a close. We constantly scour the prophecies and our Savior's prophetic [parables](#) for any overlooked instruction that might guide us through these times of turmoil and disquiet. Yet, the specifics we seek remain obstinately hidden—and for good reason, for such knowledge could easily cause us to corrupt ourselves (see [Matthew 24:45-51](#); [Luke 12:41-48](#)).

This difficulty is intensified because, on the one hand, many indicators warn that the [return of Jesus Christ](#) must be near—the fig tree has put forth its leaves, as it were ([Matthew 24:32-35](#)). But on the other hand, numerous prophesied events are *not* happening and cannot be clearly seen on the horizon. We can see signs of the [Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse](#) all around, and the degenerate moral condition of the [nations of Israel](#) is surely inviting a response from [God](#). Yet, the saints are not suffering any significant persecution ([Matthew 24:9](#); [Revelation 6:9-11](#)). The time of Jacob's Trouble may be just around the corner, but it seems to have been there for decades. The people of Israel have not been scattered and subjugated, let alone led back to Palestine in the [Second Exodus](#). The Beast and [False Prophet](#) have yet to rise to power. Jerusalem is not surrounded by armies ([Luke 21:20](#)), and no army of 200-million horsemen has ridden from the East ([Revelation 9:16](#)).

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Jesus' first-century disciples were likewise curious about "the sign of [His] coming, and of the end of the age" ([Matthew 24:3](#)). His response to their curiosity was the Olivet Prophecy, spanning [Matthew 24:4-31](#). However, in addition to the sequence of events He outlines, His answer to the disciples also contains several prophetic parables in chapters 24 and 25 that are relevant regardless of the time in which we live. Even though He gives many specifics of the events surrounding His return and the end of the age, the overall theme of His prophetic parables is "You *do not know* when I will return, so be watchful (of yourself) and prepared at all times" (see [Matthew 24:36](#), 42, 44, 50; 25:13).

Even though we look forward to His return with tremendous anticipation, we do not know when it will be. We also do not know the date of our own deaths, at which time our preparation ends. How much time do we, as individuals, have to prepare? Stephen was martyred by an angry mob shortly after the death of Christ and the founding of the New Testament church ([Acts 7:57-60](#)). While his age is never mentioned—perhaps he was called in his advanced years—he plainly had not lived many years in the truth, like the rest of the church at that time, before *his* time of preparation ended.

On the negative side, Ananias and Sapphira—who also would not have known the truth for long—had their time of preparation cut short by a foolish [sin](#) ([Acts 5:1-11](#)). Regardless of how near or far Christ's return is on the horizon, our lives could end at any point. Who is to say whether we have twenty more years—or one? The prophetic parables of Matthew 24 and 25 instruct us that "the end"—whether of this age or of this life—is entirely beyond our knowledge, so the wise will be setting their hands to the priorities of life while there is time.

In the Parable of the Rich Fool ([Luke 12:16-21](#)), Jesus describes a man caught up in the affairs of this life, enjoying the fruit of his labors, and telling himself to "take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry" (verse 19). God's response? "Fool! This night your soul [life] will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?" This man was entirely focused on the present, without any thought of preparation for the next life—or how long he had to live the present one.

Similarly, God says through the prophet Haggai, "Is it time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses, and this temple to lie in ruins?" ([Haggai 1:4](#)) Having a house—even a very nice house—is not the problem. God's rebuke comes in response to misplaced priorities. The peoples' focus was on their own comfort, while they neglected God's Temple. This is distinctly relevant to us now, for in the New Testament, God's Temple can represent either the entire body of Christ ([Ephesians 2:21](#)) or the individual Christian ([I Corinthians 3:16-17](#)). If we apply this admonition to today, it

implies that the spiritual condition of the church as a whole, as well as our individual spiritual state, is a higher priority than our material situation. The "cares, riches, and pleasures of life" are what choke out the truth of God ([Luke 8:11](#), 14).

While we may have a general understanding of the future through the prophecies, the timing is a substantial variable that we cannot know until it is upon us. Even more uncertain is how long we each have to live. But by turning our focus to our spiritual condition—for we are the Temple of God's Spirit—and to strengthening the Body of Christ wherever possible, our priorities can be in alignment with God's. Whether or not we live to witness the return of Jesus Christ is inconsequential in the sense that we will be prepared either way.

- David C. Grabbe

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

[How Long, O Lord?](#)

by John W. Ritenbaugh

In this sermon, John Ritenbaugh points out that the symbolism of the numerous (112) biblical references for trumpets suggests (1) an announcement of a specific event and (2) an alarm of what is to follow. In most cases the devastating horrendous events themselves are the figurative trumpet blasts, calling people to repent (Revelation 8:7-11:15, Amos 4:10-13, Isaiah 63:4, Matthew 24:29-31) God in His mercy has not revealed the specific times these horrendous events are to occur (Deuteronomy 29:29), but has revealed what is necessary for us to know. Our preparation for His Kingdom is best served by our not knowing specifically, spurring us on to greater activity in doing God's work. Preparation and constant vigilance should never stop (I Thessalonians 5:6-10, II Peter 3:14-18).

From the Archives: Featured Article

[What Does 'Examine Yourselves' Mean?](#)

by Staff

Each year, Christians prepare for Passover by engaging in a thorough, spiritual self-examination. An analysis of the apostle Paul's instruction in II Corinthians 13:5 shows us what we need to look for.

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