

# CAN WE REALLY KNOW “WHEN”?

Because of a long “tarrying time” and an *apparent* delay of the eschaton, any hint of a set “near time” associated with the end elicits “We are not to know.” Thus, regressive insights into prophetic information have occurred within the Christian world. Reality? Apocalyptic prophecy is loaded with timing clocks!



A favorite defensive verse is Acts 1:6-7: “*When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power.*”

- These were some of Christ’s last words to the disciples.
- They were concerned about “kingdom” and “time.”
- The counsel was disciple-specific.
- “It was not necessary for them to see farther into the future than the revelations He had made enabled them to see. Their work was to proclaim the gospel message.”<sup>1</sup>

Those “clocks” were not apropos to that day. He didn’t say that we would never know! End-time prophecies were even sealed until the time of the end (Daniel 12:4, 9)! Another verse that is almost reflexively quoted when future “prophetic time” is mentioned:

- “*But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only*” (Matthew 24:36; cf. Mark 13:32).
- The context explains a definite message.
  - Following a multiplicity of “signs”
  - Which will occur within “one generation”
  - When the “season” **is** known (fig tree parable)
  - You still won’t know the very “day and the hour”!

It is simply that simple. This concept was understood by expositor White: “The **exact time** of the second coming of the Son of man is God’s mystery.”<sup>2</sup>

“We are not to know the **definite time** either for (1) the outpouring of the Holy Spirit or for (2) the coming of Christ.”<sup>3</sup>

## The Approaching Time

Paul exhorted believers not to forsake the worship assembly. Clearly, this was to energize and intensify their hope. It would solidify the anticipated understanding of Christ’s coming.

- This is then beautifully portrayed:
- “As you see **the day** approaching” (Hebrews 10:25b).

<sup>1</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Acts of the Apostles*, p. 30.

<sup>2</sup> White, Ellen G.; *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 632-633.

<sup>3</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Evangelism*, 221.

The idiomatic expression here conveys a great reason for corporate worship by anticipating **the day** of Christ's coming as it is actually approaching. The implication is strong that we will have evidence **when** that **time** is (implication: a specific season).

- *"The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light" (Romans 13:12).*
- Paul has more to say about that "protection" of light/knowledge as it distinctly relates to this end-time event.

Look at this very carefully: *"But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you [you already know (vs 5)]. For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night [to those who are unaware of the times (vss 3-4)]. For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape. But ye, brethren, are **not in darkness**, that that day should overtake you as a thief. Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober" (I Thessalonians 5:1).*

God's people **have** timing knowledge. They are children of "light." The second-coming themes are heavily endowed with prophetic timing issues that they can "watch" for. God wants us to know these well, so the events will not come upon us suddenly – like a woman in labor.

*"Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee" (Revelation 3:3).*

- The Sardis church will experience the suddenness of a thief if they do not watch.
- If they do – a corollary – He won't come as a thief. They would know.

Prophecy does **not** guide us toward a date for His second coming. **But** – there are stunning events to show when "it is even at the doors" – the "season."

"The **exact** day and hour of Christ's coming have not been revealed. The Saviour told his disciples that he himself could not make known the hour of his second appearing. But he mentioned certain events by which they might know when his coming was near. 'There shall be signs,' he said, 'in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars.' 'The sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars of heaven shall fall.' Upon the earth, he said, there shall be 'distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring; men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth.'"<sup>4</sup>

"We are not to be engrossed with speculations in regard to the times and the seasons **which God has not revealed.**"<sup>5</sup> But we are to **know what He has taught.**

Prophetic hope is beautifully conveyed by Luke within his rendition of end-time signs:

- *When ye see these things come to pass, **know** ye that the **kingdom of God is at hand** (Luke 21:31).*

<sup>4</sup> White, Ellen G.; *The Review and Herald*, November 22, 1906 (emphasis added).

<sup>5</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Evangelism*, p. 221 (emphasis added).

- What things? The collective signs He specifically gave!
- *When* these things begin to come to pass, then *look up* and *lift up your heads*, for your **redemption draweth nigh** (Luke 21:28).

What other clocks has prophecy further revealed?

1. After being wounded and healed, the beast becomes a church and a state; then the end is in sight. A church/state began in Rome in 1929 with the Lateran Treaty (Revelation 17).
2. When the signs of Christ's apocalyptic discourse begin, all will occur within one generation – approximately 40 years (Matthew 24:34). Statistically, that began in 1978 – that is precise on an exponential curve!
3. The last three and a half years is called the “appointed time” and goes right up to the deliverance of God's people – Daniel 8:17, 19; 12:7; Revelation 11:2-3, 12:14, 13:5. It begins with the abomination that leads to desolation.
4. That final period is tied to the fall feast cycles which depict:
  - Feast of Trumpets (Revelation) – begins key final probationary events – judgment of the living
  - Atonement (Daniel) – final cleansing – kingdom made up – ready for deliverance
  - Feast of Tabernacles (Revelation) – second coming – then the seventh Seal begins

The spring feasts were associated with the first advent and the **activation** of the everlasting covenant.

“The slaying of the Passover lamb was a shadow of the death of Christ. Says Paul: ‘Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us.’ 1 Corinthians 5:7. The sheaf of first fruits, which at the time of the Passover was waved before the Lord, was typical of the resurrection of Christ. Paul says, in speaking of the resurrection of the Lord and of all His people: ‘Christ the first fruits; afterward they that are Christ's at His coming.’ 1 Corinthians 15:23. Like the wave sheaf, which was the first ripe grain gathered before the harvest, Christ is the first fruits of that immortal harvest of redeemed ones that at the future resurrection shall be gathered into the garner of God.

“These types were fulfilled, not only as to the event, but as to the time. On the fourteenth day of the first Jewish month, the very day and month on which for fifteen long centuries the Passover lamb had been slain, Christ, having eaten the Passover with His disciples, instituted that feast which was to commemorate His own death as ‘the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.’ That same night He was taken by wicked hands to be crucified and slain. And as the antitype of the wave sheaf our Lord was raised from the dead on the third day, ‘the first fruits of them that slept,’ a sample of all the resurrected just, whose ‘vile body’ shall be changed, and ‘fashioned like unto His glorious body.’ Verse 20; Philippians 3:21.”<sup>6</sup>

The fall feasts will be associated with the Second Advent and the **fulfillment** of the everlasting covenant.

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<sup>6</sup> White, Ellen G.; *The Great Controversy*, p. 399.

## **How closely can we know the time?**

As closely as the Bible clocks tell us. The explicit periods go right up to the deliverance of God's people – the eve of the consummation.

“To the period just prior to the appearing of the Son of man, the prophecies of Scripture point, and here their warnings and threatenings pre-eminently apply. The prophetic periods of Daniel, extending to the **very eve of the great consummation** [future to 1883], throw a flood of light upon events then to transpire. The book of Revelation is also replete with warning and instruction for the last generation. The beloved John, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, portrays the fearful and thrilling scenes connected with the close of earth's history, and presents the duties and dangers of God's people. **None need remain in ignorance**, none need be unprepared for the coming of the day of God.”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> White, Ellen G.; *The Review and Herald*, September 25, 1883.