

# CAN THE DATE OF JESUS' RETURN BE KNOWN?

*J. Gregory Sheryl*

ON THE MOUNT OF OLIVES the disciples asked the Lord, “What will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?” (Matt. 24:3).<sup>1</sup> And ever since then people have been trying to determine the exact time of Christ’s return and the end of the world.

Many times the Scriptures promise that Jesus will return to the earth (e. g., Matt. 24:27–25:13, 31; Mark 13:24–37; Luke 21:27; Acts 1:11; 3:20–21; 1 Cor. 1:7–8; 4:5; 11:26; 16:22; 1 Thess. 1:10; 2:19; 3:13; Heb. 9:28; Rev. 1:7; 22:20). The Scriptures also testify that the present heavens and earth will come to an end (Heb. 1:10–12; 2 Pet. 3:7, 10–13; Rev. 21:1).

When Jesus ascended to heaven and as the disciples “looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up,” two angels “said, ‘Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven’ ” (Acts 1:10–11). Just as the disciples saw Him disappear in a cloud, so He will return in the clouds, as the Scriptures state (Matt. 24:30; Mark 14:62; Rev. 1:7).

Believers differ in their views on various end-time events, including the tribulation, the millennium, and the identity of the Antichrist.<sup>2</sup> But the Lord clearly stated that the *time* of His return to

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<sup>1</sup> Unless indicated otherwise, all Scripture quotations are from the New King James Version.

<sup>2</sup> For a good discussion of the various millennial views on the second coming of Christ see Robert P. Lightner, *Last Days Handbook*, rev. ed. (Eugene, OR.: Wipf and

the earth cannot be known. He said, "But of that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father" (Mark 13:32). Likewise He said, "Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming" (Matt. 24:42). "Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not expect Him" (v. 44). "Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming" (25:13).

Because no one knows when Jesus will return, believers must constantly watch for His return and be ready for it. He said, "Take heed, watch and pray; for you do not know when the time is. . . . Watch therefore, for you do not know when the master of the house is coming—in the evening, at midnight, at the crowing of the rooster, or in the morning—lest, coming suddenly, he find you sleeping. And what I say to you, I say to all: Watch!" (Mark 13:33, 35–37). When the disciples asked, "Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6), Jesus replied, "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority" (v. 7). Yet many people have attempted to set a date for Jesus' return. A survey of their theories follows.

#### DATE-SETTERS THROUGH THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

Kyle notes, "While apocalyptic millennialism was strong in the early church, on the whole the early church fathers shied away from specific date-setting. . . . Most church fathers . . . spoke of Christ's impending but unpredictable coming."<sup>3</sup> In so doing, they were heeding the teachings of Christ regarding His second coming. However, Kyle notes exceptions to this general early practice. He specifically references Hippolytus (170–236), who predicted a date for Christ's return, and Sextus Julius Africanus (ca. 160–240), who predicted a date for the end.<sup>4</sup>

A radically charismatic and ascetic group known as the Montanists, named after their founder Montanus, who lived in the mid-

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Stock, 2005). The term "the second coming," as used in this article, refers to the return of the Lord Jesus *to the earth*, with the rapture of the church occurring seven years earlier (1 Thess. 1:10; 4:13–18; 5:9; Rev. 3:10).

<sup>3</sup> Richard Kyle, *The Last Days Are Here Again* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 37.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

to-late second century, focused on belief in an imminent millennium.

Montanus, along with [female] followers Prisca and Maximilla, fell into trances and taught that the New Jerusalem was about to descend to an obscure region of Phrygia, now modern day Turkey. Montanus declared himself to be the “Spirit of Truth,” the personification of the Holy Spirit . . . who was about to reveal all truth. He quickly gathered followers and began to spread what Montanists called “The Third Testament,” a series of revelatory messages that foretold of the soon-coming Kingdom of God. As word was spread, believers were urged to come to Phrygia to await the Second Coming.<sup>5</sup>

In AD 431 the Council of Ephesus declared Montanus a heretic.<sup>6</sup>

In the Middle Ages a division of Franciscans known as “the Spirituals’ viewed the year 1260 as the beginning of the end.”<sup>7</sup> They based this date on their study of some of the prophetic teachings of a famous twelfth-century Italian abbot, Joachim of Fiore.

During the reign of the French monarch Louis XIV (1643–1715), a group of French Protestants known as the Camisards claimed to be inspired by the Holy Spirit and uttered end-time predictions. One of their leaders, Pierre Jurieu, predicted that the judgment day would come in 1689.<sup>8</sup>

Kyle observes, “For much of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, apocalyptic excitement gripped England. End-time expectations gradually grew until they peaked in the 1640s. . . . Talk that doomsday or the millennium would arrive on this day or that became common in England.”<sup>9</sup>

In his book *End-Time Visions* Abanes includes an appendix in which he lists numerous Christian and non-Christian sources throughout history that have made end-time predictions.<sup>10</sup> Two of

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<sup>5</sup> John Williams, *The Cost of Deception* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2001), 137. The claim of Montanus to be the personification of the Holy Spirit is nonsense, since the Holy Spirit is *spirit*, and thus incorporeal, unlike Montanus.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> Kyle, *The Last Days Are Here Again*, 49.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 70.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

<sup>10</sup> Richard Abanes, *End-Time Visions* (New York: Four Walls Eight Windows, 1998), 337–42. See also his discussion on whether Christians expected Christ to return in AD 1000 (*ibid.*, 170–74).

the six chapters of Jason Boyett's irreverent but informative look at the end times record various predictions about the second coming of Christ and the end of the world throughout human history, again from both Christian and non-Christian sources.<sup>11</sup>

Abanes lists more than a dozen dates up through the eighteenth century when people said Christ would return and/or the world would end: 848, 1000, 1033, 1186, 1420, 1524, 1533, 1534, 1656, 1673, 1697, 1716, 1736, and 1792.<sup>12</sup> Boyett includes six additional dates: 793, 1583, 1600, 1666, 1694, 1719.<sup>13</sup>

### DATE-SETTERS IN THE LAST TWO HUNDRED YEARS

In modern times many others have predicted dates for the second coming of Jesus and/or the end of the world. The following pages discuss four of the better-known date-setters.

#### WILLIAM MILLER AND THE ADVENTIST MOVEMENT

"The most famous case [of an end-of-the-world prediction] on American soil . . . took place in the northeastern United States just before the Civil War."<sup>14</sup> William Miller (1782–1849), who was born in Massachusetts, was reared in a Christian home, but he rejected Christianity and became a deist. After serving as a captain in the War of 1812, he became a farmer in New York.<sup>15</sup> In 1816 Miller was converted to Christianity. "During the next two years he studied the Bible intensively with the aid of Cruden's Concordance, but without the help of commentaries. In 1818 he wrote down the conclusions to which he had arrived, which ended with this statement: 'I was thus brought, in 1818, at the close of my two-year study of the Scriptures, to the solemn conclusion, that in about twenty-five years from that time [i.e., in 1843] all the affairs of our present

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<sup>11</sup> Jason Boyett, *Pocket Guide to the Apocalypse* (Orlando, FL: Relevant, 2005), 26–73.

<sup>12</sup> Abanes, *End-Time Visions*, 337–38.

<sup>13</sup> Boyett, *Pocket Guide to the Apocalypse*, 31, 36–39.

<sup>14</sup> Bruce Shelley, "The Great Disappointment," *Christian History* 61 (1999): 31.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

state would be wound up.’<sup>16</sup>

In other words, Miller concluded from his Bible study that the world would come to an end in 1843. Hesitant about publicizing so startling a conclusion, he undertook four more years of Bible study, which confirmed his previous judgment. . . . Involved in the “winding up” of the affairs of the world was, of course, the expected return from heaven of the Lord Jesus Christ. Miller did not at first set an exact date for Christ’s return, but affirmed that this event would occur “about 1843.” Later, however, he specified that this return would take place sometime during the Jewish year running from March 21, 1843 to March 21, 1844.<sup>17</sup>

In startling contradiction to Jesus’ words that no one but God the Father knows the date of His return, Miller wrote, “I believe the time can be known by all who desire to understand and to be ready for His coming. And I am fully convinced that some time between March 21, 1843 and March 21, 1844, according to the Jewish mode of computation of time, Christ will come and bring all His saints with Him; and that then He will reward every man as His work shall be.”<sup>18</sup>

Miller seems to have arrived at this date based largely on prophecies in Daniel 8:14 and 9:24–27.<sup>19</sup> He began to make his views public in 1831, and his end-time preaching drew an extensive following. One researcher wrote, “Numbers vary, but Millerism is usually estimated to have ranged from thirty to a hundred thousand adherents.”<sup>20</sup> As might be expected, in 1843–1844 crowds grew.

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<sup>16</sup> Anthony A. Hoekema, *The Four Major Cults* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 89. Hoekema cites the Adventist author Leroy Edwin Froom, *The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1954), 4:463.

<sup>17</sup> Hoekema, *The Four Major Cults*, 89–90. Hoekema cites Francis D. Nichol, *The Midnight Cry* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1945), 169.

<sup>18</sup> *Signs of the Times*, January 25, 1843, quoted by Walter Martin, *The Kingdom of the Cults*, rev. ed. (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1985), 412. Miller’s expression about his date range being “according to the Jewish mode of computation of time” is unclear, since the dates he references are actually in the years 5603–5604 in the Jewish calendar (“Jewish/Civil Date Converter,” [http://www.chabad.org/calendar/1000year\\_cdo/aid/62225/jewish/Date-Converter.htm](http://www.chabad.org/calendar/1000year_cdo/aid/62225/jewish/Date-Converter.htm) [accessed December 10, 2010]).

<sup>19</sup> Hoekema, *The Four Major Cults*, 90. See also Martin, *The Kingdom of the Cults*, 415.

<sup>20</sup> Kyle, *The Last Days Are Here Again*, 89.

However, the fateful year passed without the Lord's return. Miller's reaction seems to have been one of stunned disbelief. He wrote, "Were I to live my life over again, with the same evidence that I then had, to be honest with God and man I should have to do as I have done. . . . I confess my error, and acknowledge my disappointment; yet I still believe that the Day of the Lord is near, even at the door; and I exhort you, my brethren, to be watchful and not let that day come upon you unawares."<sup>21</sup>

Cult expert Walter Martin wrote, "In the wake of this stunning declaration, the Millerites strove vainly to reconcile their interpretations of the prophetic Scripture with the stark truth that Christ had not returned. With one last gasp, so to speak, Miller reluctantly endorsed . . . the belief that Christ would come on October 22, 1844. . . . Once again the Millerites' hopes were lifted, and October 22, 1844, became the watchword for the return of the Lord Jesus Christ."<sup>22</sup>

Kyle describes some of the results. "Many withdrew from their churches in anticipation of the second advent. They were instructed to get their affairs in order. Many did—selling their property, closing their stores, resigning their jobs, and abandoning their animals and crops."<sup>23</sup>

When the Lord did not return on this second announced date, some referred to the event as "The Great Disappointment." After this, Miller wisely desisted from predicting any future dates for Christ's return. Through this movement the Seventh-day Adventist sect began, although Miller himself was never a member of the group. In fact he died only five years later.

Miller's experience is tragic in that he seems to have been a godly and sincere man. Perhaps he was simply ignorant of the Lord's warnings about no one being able to know the day or hour of His return. Yet Miller is an example of the folly of predicting dates for Jesus' second coming. His false predictions resulted in disappointment and disillusionment for himself and others.

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<sup>21</sup> Sylvester Bliss, *Memoirs of William Miller* (Boston: n. p., 1853), 256, quoted in Martin, *The Kingdom of the Cults*, 413.

<sup>22</sup> Martin, *The Kingdom of the Cults*, 413–14.

<sup>23</sup> Kyle, *The Last Days Are Here Again*, 90.

## CHARLES TAZE RUSSELL AND THE JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES

Charles Taze Russell (1852–1916) was the founder of what later (in 1931) became known as the Jehovah's Witnesses.<sup>24</sup> Although his parents were Presbyterians, Russell early on joined a Congregational church. However, he was troubled by certain doctrines there, especially the doctrine of hell, which he rejected. By age seventeen he had lost faith in the Bible as divinely inspired. However, after meeting with some Adventists (either Seventh-day Adventists or those who held similar beliefs),<sup>25</sup> he reported that his faith in the Bible as divinely inspired was restored.

Ridenour writes this additional information.

At the age of 18 he wandered into a church where the second coming of Christ was being discussed.<sup>26</sup> He got interested in just when Christ was to come again. To solve the problem, he began to study the Bible. Very soon he published his findings in a pamphlet entitled *The Object and Manner of the Lord's Return*. For centuries, great minds of the church have wrestled with the problem of the Second Coming, but Russell felt that he had solved it in almost no time at all.

Russell's pamphlet consists of a lengthy, complicated, and incorrect interpretation of unrelated Scriptures combined with an intricate method of computing time. The end result of his labors was the statement that Jesus Christ would return in 1874. Later, Russell changed the date to 1914. This return was not to be a physical one, but a spiritual one. In other words, when Christ would return, He would not be seen. This of course contradicts Revelation 1:7.<sup>27</sup>

Jehovah's Witnesses followed in Russell's footsteps by continuing to set dates for the coming of Christ, the battle of Armageddon, the end of the world, etc. Some of their more notable end-time dates were 1925, the 1940s, and 1975. In fact, one researcher has dubbed Jehovah's Witnesses "Armageddon, Inc."<sup>28</sup>

Kyle comments that "the Jehovah's Witnesses may be the most

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<sup>24</sup> Hoekema, *The Four Major Cults*, 223–24.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 224 and n. 3.

<sup>26</sup> This may or may not have been the same meeting and/or group where his faith in the Bible was restored.

<sup>27</sup> Fritz Ridenour, *So What's the Difference?* rev. ed. (Ventura, CA.: Regal, 1979), 106. For some unknown reason the 2001 revised edition of this book omits this incident regarding Russell.

<sup>28</sup> Abanes, *End-Time Visions*, 229.

persistent date-setters in history. Most such groups make one or perhaps two failed predictions. But the Jehovah's Witnesses won't quit. Their leaders have earmarked the years 1874, 1878, 1881, 1910, 1914, 1918, 1925, 1975, and 1984 as times of eschatological significance."<sup>29</sup>

EDGAR WHISENANT AND HIS BOOK *88 REASONS WHY THE RAPTURE WILL BE IN 1988*

Edgar Whisenant was a retired NASA engineer. As an engineer he apparently felt he had the necessary talents for ascertaining the date of the rapture of the church. Of course this is problematic because the rapture is a signless event and is imminent (i.e., it could occur at any moment).

In 1988 Whisenant published two short booklets bound together. One was called *On Borrowed Time*,<sup>30</sup> and the other was titled *88 Reasons Why the Rapture Will Be in 1988*.<sup>31</sup> He argued that the rapture would occur between September 11 and 13, 1988, on that year's time of the Jewish feast of Rosh Hashanah (the Jewish New Year).

Abanes wrote, "Whisenant had no doubts about his date, stating, 'Only if the Bible is in error am I wrong, and I say that unequivocally. There is no way biblically that I can be wrong; and I say that to every preacher in town.' During one interview he made a declaration that dramatically demonstrated his level of confidence: 'If there were a king in this country and I could gamble with my life, I would stake my life on Rosh Hashanah [19]88.'"<sup>32</sup>

Whisenant was aware of the Lord's assertion that only the Fa-

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<sup>29</sup> Kyle, *The Last Days Are Here Again*, 93.

<sup>30</sup> Edgar C. Whisenant, *On Borrowed Time*, new expanded ed. (Nashville: World Bible Society, 1988).

<sup>31</sup> Edgar C. Whisenant, *88 Reasons Why the Rapture Will Be in 1988*, new expanded ed. (Nashville: World Bible Society, 1988).

<sup>32</sup> Abanes, *End-Time Visions*, 93. For the first Whisenant quotation above, Abanes cites "Edgar Whisenant, quoted in *A Critique on the 1988 Rapture Theory* (Oklahoma City: Southwest Radio Church, 1988), 2." For the second Whisenant quotation, Abanes cites, "Edgar Whisenant, interview with radio host 'Greg' (no last name). Tape available at the Christian Research Institute, Rancho Santa Margarita, California." (Note: The Christian Research Institute is now located in Charlotte, NC).



ther knows the time of Jesus' return, because he referred to it in his book *88 Reasons*. In "Reason #1" he wrote,

It is evident that, in the minds of most Christians today, Matt. 24:36 is believed to prohibit anyone from being able to see the day of our Lord's return approaching. Matt. 24:36 states that "No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father." In looking at this statement, you can easily see that it is impossible to know the exact day and hour of the Lord Jesus' return....

There are always two days existing on earth at the same time; only at the exact second that the earth passes through the international date line does only one day exist on all the earth. At all other times, there are two days existing on earth at any one moment; one day is coming and the other day is going. So you can see the problem in trying to tell all the Christians covering the earth at any one instant of time the exact day or hour of our Lord's return. *However, this does not preclude or prevent the faithful from knowing the year, the month, and the week of the Lord's return.*<sup>33</sup>

What Whisenant was saying is, "Jesus did say you cannot know the day or hour of His return, and I agree. But He said that because while it's Tuesday here, elsewhere in the world, it's Wednesday. So, if you pick a single date in this part of the world, you would be wrong in another part of the world. But Jesus didn't say you couldn't know the *week* He would return—just the *day*."

In Acts 1:7 Jesus told His disciples that it was not for them "to know the times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority," but Whisenant contended that this is an incorrect translation; and the times and seasons can be known.<sup>34</sup> In fact Whisenant boldly claimed that "only the *exact* day and hour of Jesus' return for His Church is unknown."<sup>35</sup>

Whisenant also claimed that the word "epochs" in Acts 1:7 in the New American Standard Bible means "precise date."<sup>36</sup> But this is incorrect, for an "epoch" is an "era."

As a result of Whisenant's faulty predictions, "thousands took the booklet seriously, some even quitting their jobs to prepare for

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<sup>33</sup> Whisenant, *88 Reasons Why the Rapture Will Be in 1988*, 2–3 (italics added).

<sup>34</sup> Whisenant, *On Borrowed Time*, 1 and n. 2.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 1 (italics added). "This implies that there are only two limitations to our knowing when Jesus will return for the Church: the day and the hour" (*ibid.*, 1 n. 2).

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

the rapture.”<sup>37</sup> Time, of course, disproved Whisenant’s assertions about the rapture of the church in 1988. Undeterred by his failure, however, Whisenant simply set 1989 (and then other years after that) as dates for the rapture.

In response to Whisenant and other date-setters Oropeza, a researcher at the Christian Research Institute, wrote the helpful book *99 Reasons Why No One Knows When Christ Will Return*.<sup>38</sup>

#### HAROLD CAMPING

Abanes writes, “While [Edgar] Whisenant was a relatively obscure individual until he made his false prophecy, the year 1992 saw a more well-known Christian personality—Harold Camping, founder of Family Radio and Open Forum—make his debut as an end-time date-setter.”<sup>39</sup>

Camping predicted that the end of the world would occur in September 1994.<sup>40</sup> In 1993 Personal Freedom Outreach senior researcher G. Richard Fisher noted that Camping “states his premise on page 533 [of Camping’s book *1994?*], ‘By God’s mercy there are a few months left. However, if this study is accurate, and I believe with all my heart that it is, there will be no extensions in time. There will be no time for second-guessing. When Sept. 6, 1994 arrives, no one else can become saved. The end has come.’”<sup>41</sup>

In 1994 (but prior to Camping’s predicted September end-time date) Fisher wrote another article critiquing Camping’s date-setting.

It seems that some never learn a thing from history. The great disappointment of the Adventists in the 1800s, the disenchantment of the

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<sup>37</sup> Dean C. Halverson, “88 Reasons: What Went Wrong?” *Christian Research Journal* 11 (fall 1988): 14. Halverson refers to “Book Predicts End of World: Some Quit Jobs,” *Colorado Springs Gazette Telegraph*, September 31, 1988, part A. Halverson’s article is available at <http://www.equip.org/articles/88-reasons-what-went-wrong> (accessed December 10, 2010).

<sup>38</sup> B. J. Oropeza, *99 Reasons Why No One Knows When Christ Will Return* (Downers Grove, IL.: InterVarsity, 1994).

<sup>39</sup> Abanes, *End-Time Visions*, 94.

<sup>40</sup> Harold Camping, *1994?* (New York: Vantage, 1992).

<sup>41</sup> G. Richard Fisher, “Will Jesus Return in 1994? The Prognostications of Harold Camping,” *Quarterly Journal* 43 (January–March 1993): 1.

failed dates of the Jehovah's Witnesses throughout the 1900s, and the more recent letdowns of Edgar Whisenant ought to at least make people cautious. Camping's failure may make some more cautious but it also may throw others into skepticism and ridicule of the Christian message. That will be the tragedy of it all. . . . Our prayer is that God will ready Harold Camping for genuine repentance and a renouncing of his bizarre extremes.<sup>42</sup>

Sadly, however, Camping did not learn from his errors. A few years later in 2005 Camping published another volume in which he again predicted the end of the world—this time, in the fall of 2011. He wrote, "It does not appear that we can know with any certainty the calendar date that will be the last day of the history of the world. We are probably far wiser in simply indicating that it will, in all likelihood, occur in the fall of A.D. 2011."<sup>43</sup>

Camping evidently believes that the end of the world and Christ's return will occur simultaneously, since he states that "the return of Christ is at the end of the world."<sup>44</sup> However, Camping threw all caution to the wind by predicting a *specific date* for the end of the world. The *San Francisco Chronicle* carried a story on New Year's Day, 2010, about Camping and his 2011 prediction.

Camping, 88, has scrutinized the Bible for almost 70 years and says he has developed a mathematical system to interpret prophecies hidden within the Good Book. One night a few years ago, Camping, a civil engineer by trade, crunched the numbers and was stunned at what he'd found: The world will end May 21, 2011.

This is not the first time Camping has made a bold prediction about Judgment Day. On Sept. 6, 1994, dozens of Camping's believers gathered inside Alameda's Veterans Memorial Building to await the return of Christ, an event Camping had promised for two years. Followers dressed children in their Sunday best and held Bibles open-faced toward heaven.

But the world did not end [in 1994]. Camping allowed that he may have made a mathematical error. He spent the next decade running new calculations, as well as overseeing a media company that has grown significantly in size and reach.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> G. Richard Fisher, "Ready for Failure?: The Further Prognostications of Harold Camping," *Quarterly Journal* 14 (July–September 1994): 14.

<sup>43</sup> Harold Camping, *Time Has an End: A Biblical History of the World 11,013 BC—AD 2011* (New York: Vantage, 2005), 420.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>45</sup> Justin Berton, "Biblical Scholar's Date for Rapture: May 21, 2011," *San Fran-*

Noting that some of Camping's employees were wearing T-shirts that said, "May 21, 2011," the article continued, "They're happy to talk about the day they believe their souls will be retrieved by Christ. 'I'm looking forward to it,' said Ted Solomon, 60, who started listening to Camping in 1997. He's worked at Family Radio since 2004."<sup>46</sup> The article concluded,

Rick LaCasse, who attended the September 1994 service in Alameda, said that 15 years later, his faith in Camping has only strengthened. "Evidently, he was wrong," LaCasse allowed, "but this time it is going to happen. There was some doubt last time, but we didn't have any proofs. This time we do."

Would his opinion of Camping change if May 21, 2011, ended without incident?

"I can't even think like that," LaCasse said. "Everything is too positive right now. There's too little time to think like that."<sup>47</sup>

"One can only wonder how Rick LaCasse (and many others who believed Camping's May 21st prediction) are doing, now that Camping's prediction has failed again. After Jesus didn't return on the predicted date, an unrepentant Harold Camping set another date for Christ's return, this time on October 21, 2011. It is not surprising that Jesus did not oblige Camping's folly, in that He again did not return on the date Camping predicted in direct opposition to Christ's statement that "of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father" (Mark 13:32). In some of His final words on earth before He ascended to heaven, Christ admonished His disciples, "It is not for you to know times or dates the Father has set by His own authority" (Acts 1:7, NIV). Regrettably a number of other well-known Christian personalities have suggested dates for the rapture and/or the second coming of Christ and/or the end of the world. If the Lord tarries, there will no doubt be more like William Miller, Charles Taze Russell, Edgar Whisenant, and Harold Camping—people who fail to heed the Lord's words about inability to know when He will return.

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*cisco Chronicle*, January 1, 2010, C-1; <http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2010/01/01/BA8V1AV589.DTL> (accessed December 10, 2010).

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

## SUMMARY

Lightner, who has taught courses in both theology and biblical studies for approximately fifty years, has written the following:

Date-setting for end-time events is of course not new. . . . William Miller predicted Christ would return in 1843. [Charles] Taze Russell of the Jehovah's Witnesses set 1914 as the date of Christ's return. Herbert W. Armstrong, and his son, Garner Ted Armstrong, said in 1966 [that] the kingdom of Christ would come in ten or fifteen years.

Hal Lindsey . . . predicted Christ would return about forty years after the May 14, 1948 establishment of the nation Israel. See his *The Late Great Planet Earth*, and his more recent: *The 1980's: Countdown to Armageddon*, in which he asserts that this present generation is the one that will witness the return of Christ.

Edgar C. Whisenant's prediction . . . was accompanied with considerable boasting that he had incontrovertible proof that his date for Christ's return in 1988 was correct and, only if the Bible was wrong, could he be wrong. When it became obvious he *was* wrong, he changed the date to January 1989 and later updated it again to September 1989. Such dogmatic error serves only to hurt the cause with which it is associated.<sup>48</sup>

One thing believers know with certainty is that Christ's return is closer every day. As Paul stated, "Now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed" (Rom. 13:11). And he wrote, "For *at just the right time* Christ will be revealed from heaven by the blessed and only almighty God, the King of all kings and Lord of all lords" (1 Tim. 6:15, NLT, italics added).

Knowing that Christ may return at any moment, believers say with Paul, "O Lord, come!" (1 Cor. 16:22). And the Bible ends with this same prayer: "And the Spirit and the bride say, 'Come!' And let him who hears say, 'Come!' And let him who thirsts come. And whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely. . . . He who testifies to these things says, 'Surely I am coming quickly.' Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus!" (Rev. 22:17, 20).

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<sup>48</sup> Lightner, *Last Days Handbook*, 183 (italics his).