# 21 May 2011 **[1]**

Submitted by Wessel on Friday, 21 May 2010 - 10:50

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When I first heard that some people were claiming that the world will end on 21 May 2011 [2], I wanted to furiously post a rebuke here. But I decided to rein myself in until I have learned more (or at least until I had actually read the whole tract [3]).

Of course there is actually a lot of information to go through: the tract points one to websites and books, even a radio station, and a forum has been set up to discuss this matter. But what I want to do is write a response to just the tract: what should someone think who has been handed such a flyer at a traffic light or walking through a park?

## Synopsis of the "new doctrine"

On 21 May 2011 the rapture will take place and God's judgement on mankind will begin. It will also signal the end of the period of great tribulation, which started in 1988. Judgement will last until 21 October 2011 when the earth will be destroyed by fire.

21 May 2011 is significant, because it will mark the 7000th anniversary of Noah leaving the ark, an event the author of the tract claims is significant essentially because of Genesis 7:4 and 2 Peter 3:6–8.

## So, is that a date then?

Firstly, I should state that I default to scepticism about end-of-the-world predictions. In my initial desire to write this article, it would have been out of bias. While I can't claim that this article is without bias, I hope that it is at least rational. So why do I default to scepticism in this matter? Well, doomsday predictions are always guaranteed to get the attention of people: if not everyone, then some. In my short life I've already lived through a fair share of armageddons. Does anyone remember Y2K? If the machines weren't going to kill us (and this was the "scientific" concern), then God surely would. Michael Drosnin's *The Bible Code* (remember that?) also had some dates in it, I'm sure. And everyone is up in arms because in 2012 the Mayan calendar flips over to a new period. I was curious about how many such scares there have been (I know 1666 was one and the Jehovah's Witnesses had a couple as well). So I Google'd for `list dates end world` and the first link that came up [4] had collected ~220 dates for the end of the world throughout the so-called "Christian era". (**Please note** that I do not necessarily support or endorse that website or all the views offered there.)

## A Biblical Basis? Really?

21 May 2011 is going to be *the* day, however, claims the proponents of this new doctrine. The proof of this lies within the Holy Bible itself, they claim. The tract says

> The Bible is the Word of God! Everything the Bible declares has the full authority of God Himself.

I agree fully with this. I also believe that the Bible in itself contains all that is necessary to interpret it. The followers of the new doctrine apparently disagrees, as the tract continues:

> Now at this time information is coming forth from the Bible which clearly reveals God's plan for Judgement Day and the end of the world itself. The Bible has opened up its secrets concerning the timeline of history.

This means that they believe that a brand new revelation has been given to them to understand the Bible in a way which Bible scholars for 2000 years have been unable to do. This actually contradicts the doctrine that the Bible is self-interpreting[1], because, they claim, external revelation is necessary to understand it.

Another worrying thing is to whom this revelation has been given. Quoting the tract:

> The child of God has learned from the Bible that...

No further information is given about this mysterious character[2], almost elevating him to some mystical (messianic?) position. So a *special* revelation (which has been hidden from scholars for millennia) has been given to a *special* person. Now I'm starting to be cautious.

## Exactly

The most notable thing about the tract (apart from the obvious message, of course), is the claim that, using the Bible, the exact day of creation, and—more importantly, according to the theory—the days on which the Great Flood ended and on which Noah left the ark have been calculated. They claim that their calculations are sound and are reliable as it comes straight from the Bible. Whoever did the counting, however, was not the first one: several people have tried to date Creation using the Bible, at least as a basis. Dates range from roughly 58000 BC to 3760 BC[3],[4]. While that list pertains to the Creation, the same methodologies used to calculate those dates can be used to calculate dates for the Flood: thus each calculation would also arrive at a different date for that. I do not believe that the date of Creation is meant to be learned from the Bible and am very suspicious of anyone who claims to know this exact date.

## In Context, or out of Context?

It is claimed that Genesis 7:4 has a twofold meaning: one obvious and one which has been hidden until now. The obvious one has nothing to do with the world ending: within context, the world has just been destroyed, but Noah enters a new world! It is the same earth, but a new beginning for mankind. The second meaning is obscure and needs to be linked to another passage (which itself has a completely different context) to be understood. Nothing else in the Bible supports this second interpretation and therefore I must reject it.

It is ironic that the second most important scripture quoted is from 2 Peter and that the tract actually refers to the context of 2 Peter. Peter's second letter can be broken up into three main parts:

1. An encouragement to the readers to continue to grow as Christians (2 Peter 1),
2. A warning against false teachers who peddle heresies (2 Peter 2), and
3. A reminder that Jesus will one-day return (2 Peter 3).

The tract quotes 2 Peter 3:6–8, so let us focus on 2 Peter 3. 2 Peter was one of the very lasts books of the Bible to have been written. Christianity was flourishing, but time was also passing. The Christians were preaching that the return of Jesus was imminent. As the years went on, people started to scoff at the Christians and the fact that Jesus has not yet returned. Peter thus writes to his readers to remind them that Jesus has given His Word and always keeps His Word. Jesus *will* therefore return, and that is a certainty. I believe that when Peter said

> But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.
>
> 2 Peter 3:6 (ESV)

Peter isn't giving a prophecy. Rather, he is assuring his readers that God does not reckon time as humans do. But he is not saying that God reckons time strictly to that formula! God is eternal and infinite and transcends time: for God, can one second (as measured by humans) not also be like 1000 years? Can 12 minutes not be like 23 days? Can 103 years not be like 5 microseconds? See also Psalm 90:45 (in the context of the whole chapter!).

No, I do not believe that Peter here is giving a formula whereby to calculate the end of the world. He is encouraging his readers against scoffers and heretics. And I find the fact that the originators of this new doctrine use 2 Peter—which largely speaks out against and condemns false teachers—in their predictions very ironic.

## It is not for us to know

And something which I find audacious is how the tract quotes 2 Peter 3:10 and completely ignores the first half of the verse (emphasis added):

> But the day of the Lord *will come like a thief*, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.
>
> 2 Peter 3:10 (ESV)

They are happy to quote the second part of the verse to emphasise the coming doom, but ignore the fact that Peter says that this will come *unexpectedly*. This first half of the verse cannot be ignored, as he merely echoes the words of his Lord Jesus the Messiah:

> [35]Stay dressed for action and keep your lamps burning, [36]and be like men who are waiting for their master to come home from the wedding feast, so that they may open the door to him at once when he comes and knocks. [37]Blessed are those servants whom the master finds awake when he comes. Truly, I say to you, he will dress himself for service and have them recline at table, and he will come and serve them. [38]If he comes in the second watch, or in the third, and finds them awake, blessed are those servants! [39]But know this, that if the master of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have left his house to be broken into. [40]You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect." [41]Peter said, "Lord, are you telling this parable for us or for all?" [42]And the Lord said, "Who then is the faithful and wise manager, whom his master will set over his household, to give them their portion of food at the proper time? [43]Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes. [44]Truly, I say to you, he will set him over all his possessions. [45]But if that servant says to himself, 'My master is delayed in coming,' and begins to beat the male and female servants, and to eat and drink and get drunk, [46]the master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he

> does not know, and will cut him in pieces and put him with the unfaithful. [47]And that servant who knew his master's will but did not get ready or act according to his will, will receive a severe beating. [48]But the one who did not know, and did what deserved a beating, will receive a light beating. Everyone to whom much was given, of him much will be required, and from him to whom they entrusted much, they will demand the more.
>
> Luke 12:35–48 (ESV)

and

> [35]Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away. No One Knows That Day and Hour [36]But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only.
>
> Matthew 24:35–36 (ESV)

In this second passage, Jesus is telling His disciples what the signs of the end of the age would be like. They were concerned about these matters and asked Him about it, just as people today are concerned about it. After Jesus' ascension, the disciples realised, however, that their purpose was not to dwell on these things. They were driven by one thing and one thing alone: proclaiming the gospel of Jesus the Messiah to as many people as possible. This is what the driving force of every Christian should be.

In addition to the Matthew passage, I also want to point you towards 1 Peter 1:10–12:

> [10]Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired carefully, [11]inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories. [12]It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in the things that have now been announced to you through those who preached the good news to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, things into which angels long to look.
>
> 1 Peter 1:10–12 (ESV)

The Bible is full of promises and prophecies. In general, those who received the promises or prophecies did not see the fulfilment of these things in their lives. Abraham, Moses, David, the major Prophets, all of these people received revelation, but not realisation. Peter tells us that many people longed to know when the Messianic age would come (some Jews are still waiting for this).

We must realise and accept that we are not meant to know everything. Like the apostles, we must not dwell on the future. (If anything, we must look forward to the return of our Saviour!) But we are in the present and while here we have work that we would do well not to be distracted from. That work is the same as that of the apostles: to proclaim the gospel of Jesus the risen Lord to all peoples.

## Cult or Heresy?

I am very hesitant to use words like "cult" and "heresy" (the former, especially, is used very loosely in my immediate environment). All that I can in good conscience do is to tell people to be very careful of this group and their teachings. Yes, they do believe that the Bible has full authority (even if they augment it to some degree) and yes they proclaim salvation in Jesus alone, but some of the other things are less savoury:

> On May 21st, 1988, God finished using the churches and congregations of the world. The Spirit of God left all churches and Satan, the man of sin, entered into the churches to rule at that point in time. The Bible teaches us that this awful period of judgement upon the churches would last for 23 years.

In one swooping statement they denounce all contemporary churches. 1988 was a long time ago... in fact, that would mean that I have heard Satan preaching for my whole life. Whoever this group is, they clearly do not think about themselves as a church, or if they do they believe that they are the only church untainted by Satan. Yet even during this period of "tribulation", many churches continue to preach the same gospel which has been preached for 2000 years. A lot don't, of course, but others do. This statement of theirs is very brash and makes me even more cautious of them.

## A Thought Experiment

But what if. What if the world were to end on 21 May 2011? What if you knew without a doubt that the world were to end then? What then? Usually I dislike the "what-if" game, but I think this time the answer should be reasonably clear: you need to get right with God. And, if you are already a Christian, you need to make sure the people around you get right with God, because when Judgement Day comes it will be too late. The ones you loved will be lost forever.

So the tract calls for action. To quote it again

> Our prayer is that you will receive this tract in the spirit of genuine concern in which it is being offered.

I cannot justify why, but I do think that most, if not all, of the people involve are sincere in their concerns. The truth is that we all need to be concerned for the people around us all the time. These people do it under the threat of 21 May 2011. While I think that is misguided, I do think that we are under an imminent "threat": as Peter's readers were reminded, so we should be reminded that Jesus *is* coming back. Whether it is tomorrow, 20 May 2011 or in a thousand years' time, we need to be actively working to expand the Kingdom: God does not want the new earth to be sparsely populated. Rather we should work to bring the gospel of Jesus to all people.

## Conclusion

So, to summarise:

- I do not believe that the dates given for the Creation and Flood are accurate and that building a prediction or an argument on exact dates is very unstable.
- The passages used, while claimed to be within context, where out of context where it mattered.
- As humans we are *not* meant to know when the world is going to end, whether by revelation of conclusion.

It is therefore my recommendation that you pay no attention to this group or any doomsday cult. Stop worrying when the sky is going to fall on your head and get out and start spreading the gospel of Jesus the risen Lord! And if His death on the cross is not enough to compel you to start doing so, the you have a much bigger problem than a world which might end tomorrow.

- 1. A doctrine known as Perspicuity of Scripture. I am not going to go into this now, but see, for example, this link [5].
- 2. Perhaps one Harold Camping [6]?

- 3. This includes calculations by Rabbis.
- 4. See the list of Judeo-Christian estimates for the date of Creation at Wikipedia [7].
- 5. Here 1000 years is likened to one day for God ("like a day that has just gone by") or 3 hours ("like a watch in the night").

## Categories:

- In the Media [8]

## Tags:

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