

New Year Prophecies & Promises

R. Stanley, 15 December 2020

The final months of each year are the hectic preparation time in Churches for Christmas and New Year celebrations. Once Christmas is over, we are on top gear preparing for the Midnight Service of December 31. We normally think that the New Year begins at midnight 12 of this last day of the year. Strictly speaking, according to the Bible, a day begins at sunset on the previous day. The first day of creation was not “morning and evening,” but “evening and morning” (Gen 1:5). So also the second, third, fourth, fifth and sixth days (vv8,13,19,23,31). The Day of Passover began with the evening of that day (Ex 12:8). The Sabbath was “from evening to evening” (Lev 23:32). The early Church observed the first day of the week as the Lord’s Day and it began in the evening of the seventh day (Acts 20:7,11). The day begins with sunset and ends with sunset. That’s why we are admonished not to retain anger beyond sunset (Eph 4:26). In the New Testament, it’s more as “night and day” than “day and night” (Lk 2:37; Acts 20:31; 26:7; 1 Thess 2:9; 3:10; 2 Thess 3:8; 1 Tim 5:5; 2 Tim 1:3). When I explained this point to some Pastors, they shifted their New Year Service to evening six of December 31. Personally I would prefer an evening six Service on the 31st so I may stay awake and active instead of sleeping on the first day of the year! Usually I visit about a dozen non-Christian homes in the early hours of the New Year day to greet them with the word, “Peace!” (Mt 10:11,12; Lk 10:5,6).

Of course, no one can say it’s wrong to hold a New Year Service at 12 midnight. But the importance we attach to 12 O’ Clock is not Bible-based. The purpose of this article is not to talk about the timing but to point out certain unscriptural traditions and practices highly prevalent in Christian circles with respect to the dawn of the New Year.

(A) New Year Prophecies

Celebrity preachers pull crowds to their special New Year Services promising to deliver prophecies for the New year. Most of what they prophesy never comes to pass. In fact what happens is diametrically opposite. One preacher predicted that the year 2020 would be golden. It was neither gold nor silver! Another said that God would place Spirit-filled youngsters in top governmental positions in 2020. We know how the political scenario developed in our country this year. The predictions of certain evangelical prophets about the 2020 US election outcome have gone awry. Numerous prophecies after the outbreak of Corona in 2020 never came to pass. Modern Christians who are by and large Biblical illiterates get easily deceived. The worst thing about deception is that the deceived would not know that they are deceived. Pastors and Leaders are to be blamed because they do not train the believers in the art of discernment. Sunday Services are designed so as to attract more attendees rather than to help believers grow. Discernment as a gift is only to some, whereas as an art it’s for everyone to learn (1 Cor 12:10; Heb 5:14; 1 Cor 2:14).

As we approach 31 Dec 2020, I prophesy that more untrue prophecies would come forth from popular lying lips. My prophecy is simply the repetition of the words of Jesus: “MANY false prophets will rise up and deceive MANY” (Mt 24:11). Because of a few signs and wonders performed by the false prophets, “even the very elect” would be deceived (v24). The forewarning of Jesus is to forearm us (v25). We must never forget that the false prophets would outnumber

the true ones. Note the word “many” (Mt 7:15,22; 24:5; 2 Cor 2:17; Phil 3:18; 1 Jn 2:18). The hidden agenda of pseudo prophets is love of money (2 Pet 2:3,15). They are the modern Balaams though occasionally they would deliver some true prophecies (Jude 11; Num 22:15-17).

A basic understanding of what endtime prophecy is will safeguard us from many a peril. The very Bible is called the “Word of Prophecy” (2 Pet 1:19). It is called the “Prophetic Scriptures” (Rom 16:26). The central theme of Prophecy, whether it’s Old Testamental or New Testamental, is “Jesus Christ.” The Book of Revelation which is all prophecy states, “The testimony of Jesus is the spirit (= essence) of prophecy” (Rev 19:10c). There are about 100 prophecies in the Bible about Christ’s first coming, and nearly 300 about His second coming. He is the Father God’s last prophetic voice (Heb 1:1,2). He came as the Prophet of prophets (Dt 18:17,18; Acts 3:22,23; Jn 6:14; 7:40). Any prophecy today must therefore be Christ-centred. It is in this sense, all of us under the anointing of the Holy Spirit are called to prophesy in these last days (Acts 2:16-18). Fortright messages to practically prepare us for the soon-coming of Jesus are the need of the hour. In His Letters to the seven Churches in Revelation 2 & 3, Jesus says five times, “I come quickly” (Rev 2:5,16,25; 3:3,11). And the book ends with, “Surely I am coming quickly” (22:20). Apostle John’s introductory statement to this book is, “Behold, He is coming!” (1:7).

Unfortunately we are over-interested in and excited about personal predictive prophecies and sensational issues. This is what sidetracks us from God’s main purpose for this Church age and lands us in trouble. Once disillusioned by false prophecies, our inner convictions get shaken up though we don’t show it out. We simply silence them. Inspired utterances of the written Word of God which build up His people through “edification, exhortation and comfort” should be the norm of the prophetic gift in the Church (1 Cor 14:3). This teaching by Paul is endorsed by Peter: “If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles (= words) of God” (1 Pet 4:10,11; 2 Pet 1:20,21). This is also primarily speaking “to one another” with the fullness of the Spirit and the Scriptures (1 Pet 4:10; Eph 5:18,19; Col 3:16).

We don’t need to predict who would be the next President or the Prime Minister. Let it be Herod or Pilate! Let it be Nebuchadnezzar or Darius! Let it be fire or lions! It makes no difference for the Spirit-filled witnesses of Jesus Christ. God knows who should be elected or ejected (Dan 5:21c). We dare not counsel the Omniscient God with our chicken brain (Rom 11:33,34). Public prayers or predictions to prompt Christians to support one particular political party against the other will create unnecessary animosity from the opposite party cadre. Personal convictions must not be made public. With the Elections in Tamilnadu and several Indian States round the corner, I beg my Preacher friends to please stay silent on these issues while on the pulpit. The present political situation in the Christian America has divided the Church as Democratic Christians and Republican Christians. This could have been avoided if Christian spokespersons there would have behaved more scripturally. We already have enough of divisions and splits. We Indian Christians had to cut a sorry face by the outcome of the recent elections. Operation of the prophetic gift in the context of a local Church is much safer as there would be discernment by other fellow prophets (1 Cor 14:29-33). This healthy check will prevent disastrous consequences. Superstardom is not New Testamental (Acts 13:1; 15:32). When the so-called prophecies of celebrities go awry, they must gracefully tell the public: “Sorry for misleading you. Yes, I now agree with Paul that we know in part and we prophesy in part. Pray for me that I might still grow in the understanding of God’s ways” (1 Cor 13:9,11). They would grow one inch taller.

Amos 3:7 is an oft-quoted text by popular preachers: “Surely the Lord God does nothing, unless He reveals His secret to His servants the prophets.” This Old Testament statement is a prediction that the entire Church in the New Testament era would be a prophetic community to speak forth God’s message to the world (Acts 2:17,18,21). The very next verse, Amos 3:8, asks, “A lion has roared! Who will not fear? The Lord God has spoken! Who can but prophesy?” This was the prophetic anticipation of Moses (Num 11:29). This was Paul’s ambition too (1 Cor 14:1,5a,31). What Jesus told His disciples in John 15:15 throws further light on this matter. Each local Church must be like the one in Thessalonica (1 Thess 1:8). God does not bypass the Church and bless the world. Rather, the Holy Spirit joins her the Bride to woo sinners to the living waters (Rev 22:17). That’s why Evan Roberts (1878-1951), the key instrument God used in the Welsh Revival at the dawn of the 20th Century, prayed, “Lord, bend the Church and bless the world!”

Are you anxious to know how the Year 2021 would be? Turn to Matthew 24 & 25. The 100 verses of these two chapters are Christ’s answer to His disciples’ three questions: “When will these things be? What will be the sign of Your coming? What will be the sign of the end of the age?” (24:3). These 20-century old questions are ours too. Do take time to read through these two all-important chapters a couple of times to understand what 2021 and years to follow would be like, and how we are to live. Let me briefly list the things we must give attention to —

(1) The very first sentence of Jesus in His 100-verse long answer is, “Take heed that no one **deceives** you” (Mt 24:4). Doctrinal deception is primary (v11). I urge Pastors and Preachers to teach sound doctrine to their members and listeners on a regular basis (2 Tim 4:2-4; Tit 2:1). That’s the only way to protect them from ravenous wolves (Acts 20:27-31). Warn them beware of novelties and questionable things. Extra-biblical stuff must be summarily rejected.

(2) Conflicts between nations will be on the rise (Mt 24:6,7). International peace efforts would bring meagre results. Handshakes and hugs between national leaders will not mean anything. Border disputes would multiply. Weaker nations would be exploited.

(3) Persecution will increase for Christians both in secular and non-secular countries (Mt 24:9,10). Imprisonment and martyrdom would become the norm. Missionary organisations and evangelistic agencies will have a tough time. Nevertheless the Church growth would be phenomenal (vv13,14; 16:18). We must earnestly seek the face of the Lord to send us a sweeping revival that would restore to the Church the saltiness and brightness it ought to have (Mt 5:13,14). Jesus spoke about salt and light in the context of persecution (vv11,12). Preachers and Christians would betray one another before anti-Christians (Mt 24:10; Lk 21:16).

(4) Natural love between spouses, parents & children, siblings, and fellow-men would deteriorate (Mt 24:12; 2 Tim 3:1-5). The world will become more and more impersonal. Selfishness will dominate all sections of the society. Lying and cheating would be common.

(5) Sensual pleasures will become the prominent pursuit of men and women. Material-mindedness would plague both the Church and the society (Mt 24:36-39). Sexual immorality would be rampant at every level (Jude 16-19). Entertainment industry would thrive as never before. The digital world will swallow our youngsters like whales. Even Christian believers would enjoy eating and shopping more than spending quality time in prayer and Bible meditation (Lk 17:26-30; 21:34-36).

(6) We can expect more **plagues** and **pestilences** in the years to come (Mt 24:7). Corona may revisit us more virulently. We may have to face new types of epidemics and pandemics also. We do need science and technology, but God would not tolerate us worshipping them. Sufferings would shake our faith (Lk 18:8). But God is faithful who would not allow us to be tempted beyond our ability and His enablement (1 Cor 10:12,13).

(7) Men would rejoice on their privileges more than realizing their responsibilities. Whether believers or unbelievers, the **stewardship** responsibility is on all people concerning God-given blessings and resources. God would reward faithfulness in stewardship duly. The Parable of Servants and the Parable of Talents emphasize this truth (Mt 24:43-51; 25:14-30). The trend of the rich becoming richer, and the poor becoming poorer will continue. But we Christians must multiply our charitable activities and repent of stinginess (vv31-46).

(B) New Year Promises

The next thing that excites Christians at the end of a year is New Year Promises. As a part of our regular devotional exercise, we can definitely wait before the Lord to give us a specific Bible promise which we can hold on to throughout the New Year as we pass through mountains and valleys, and fires and floods. But looking to popular preachers as to what promise they would get from God for the year may mislead us. Each celebrity preacher would quote a promise. Which one is for you if you attend three or four meetings? Television programmes would further confuse you. A basic understanding of how to handle the Promises of God will help us avoid disappointments —

Most of the promises quoted by preachers as for the New Year are from the Old Testament. Unless we differentiate between the various categories of these promises, we would be misled. There are (1) *Personalised Promises*. For example, God told Abraham, “I will curse him who curses you” (Gen 12:3b). Perhaps the disciples thought about this when they sought permission from Jesus to bring down fire on an unresponsive Samaritan village. But Jesus rebuked them for their wrong spirit (Lk 9:52-56). Jesus prayed for those who cursed Him with blasphemy. He has taught us to bless those who curse us (Mt 5:44,45). The promise to Abraham cannot be taken in today’s missionary context, though he was the first missionary! Then we have (2) *National or Tribal Promises*. Moses before his death told of the tribe of Naphtali that they would possess the West and the South (Dt 33:23). This was for the territorial allotment in the Promised Land (Josh 19:32). God had promised to Israel that He would gather them after scattering them. The Tibetan or the Srilankan refugee Christians cannot claim for them this promise for returning to their motherland! We also have (3) *Dispensational Promises*. In Isaiah 11:6-9 we read that the wolf would dwell with the lamb, the leopard would sleep with the young goat, the young lion would play with the calf, the bear would graze with the cow, the lion would eat straw like the ox, the young child would play by the cobra’s hole, and so on! This refers to the future reign of Christ on earth. This is not applicable in the Church age. Another category is (4) *Messianic Promises*. The promise for the righteous in Psalm 34:20 is, “He guards all his bones; not one of them is broken.” This was quoted in John 19:36 as to why the bones of Jesus were not broken by the soldiers, even after He died (Jn 19:33,36). Though we can ask God for His protection of our bodies, this particular promise was made exclusively for God’s Son. Even the legs of the “forgiven” thief were broken (v32). How many servants of God have sustained fractures in road accidents or slippery bathrooms!

There are also a few favourite promises for the Preachers for their Magazines and Calendars.

- One is Isaiah 25:8, “The Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces.” Which of the Preachers and People is without tears today? Only “some” tears are wiped today. This promise in Isaiah will be fulfilled only when Christ returns (Rev 7:17; 21:4).
- Another famous Calendar text, especially for January, is Haggai 2:19, “From this day forward I will bless you!” “This day” refers to the Second Advent of Christ when God would shake heaven and earth and overthrow kingdoms to establish the millennial reign (vv20-23). The blessing of blessings begins blossoming in a man’s life on the day when he experiences personal salvation from sin (Lk 19:9,10; 2 Cor 6:2).
- I am sick of Tamil Christian Calendars where the word, “nations,” in Deuteronomy 28:1 is translated as “castes!” Obnoxious! What would a non-Nadar non-Christian think when he sees this calendar text in a Nadar Christian home? Do not get angry with me, friends! We need discretion besides devotion. Burn such calendar sheets. Change these words appropriately picking them up from modern translations like *Thiruviviliam*.

Another category of Bible Promises is (5) *Situational Promises*. When Jesus sent forth the twelve on the Gospel mission, He told them not to take moneypurse with them (Mt 10:5-10). This was during a particular trip to the villages of “Israel” (vv5,6). Later He asked them to carry money with them (Lk 22:35,36). In the city of Corinth the Lord promised Paul protection from physical assault (Acts 18:9,10). But there was no such promise in Jerusalem (Acts 22:17-21). He was rather beaten black and blue (vv23-25). Where were the guardian angels then? Had they gone on furlough? (Psa 34:7).

Not only for the New Year but also for various matters several Bible promises are misquoted. One classic example is what Preachers and Pastors claim for their mega Church buildings or Prayer Towers. They quote Deuteronomy 12:5,13 and 2 Chronicles 7:12,15,16 and claim sanctity and speciality for their structures. I pity their ignorance of the dispensational dealings of God. Jesus corrected the Samaritan woman’s traditional belief concerning a Prayer Mountain (Jn 4:20-24). Under this dispensation of grace, Jesus is there “in the midst” of “wherever” two or three gather in His Name (Mt 18:20). Today God does not sanctify places but only people (Eph 2:19-22). No place is holier than the other. The veil is torn (Mt 27:51; Mk 15:38). Do not restitch it! The first martyr of the Church rightly said, “The Most High does not dwell in temples made with hands!” (Acts 7:48). If you say this to a High Anglican or a Roman Catholic, be careful, you may be killed like Stephen!

Then arises a question: “What’s then the meaning of 2 Corinthians 1:20 that ALL the promises of God in Christ are Yes, and in Him Amen?” The key words are “IN CHRIST”... “IN HIM”—that is, all the promises pertaining to REDEMPTIVE blessings: (a) Promise of Eternal Life (Tit 1:1-3; 1 Jn 5:13); (b) Promise of Salvation thro’ Christ (Heb 11:13,39,40); (c) Promise of Righteousness without works (Rom 4:3,6-8,13,14); (d) Promise of Rest in Christ (Heb 4:1; Mt 11:28); (e) Promise of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:4; 2:33a); (f) Promise of partaking the Divine Nature (2 Pet 1:4); (g) Promise of Security in Christ (Jn 10:27-29); (h) Promise of Resurrection (Acts 26:6-8). These are the “spiritual blessings” we are enjoying in the heavenlies with Christ (Eph 1:3).

Another question: “Cannot God use any of the Bible promises to convey to me a personal message of encouragement, assurance and deliverance?” God can. God does. But we must not generalise any promise other than the promises pertaining to redemptive blessings. There again

we must work within the framework of what's explained in the above paragraphs lest we get disillusioned. I urge you to listen to the lessons I taught in the Sound Doctrine Seminar-I (1997), SDS-II (2007) and SDS-III (2012). These will be available through WhatsApp and my Website in the audio format from January 2021.

Decade of Responsibilities

Churches and Christian organisations worldwide have declared 2021-2030 as a Decade of Revival. Should it be a Decade of "Revival" or a Decade of "Responsibilities?" When we keep saying, "Revival," we throw the matter entirely on God's shoulders. We think that God is reluctant to send a Revival and we need to force Him. It's not so. The imbalance in Christian life and ministry is that we overemphasize God's part and do not stress enough our responsibility. Most of the Biblical passages on Revival state "our" responsibility (2 Chr 7:14; Hos 6:1-3; Isa 57:15; Joel 2:17-19,23; Acts 3:19,20). Slighting our responsibility may be one main reason why Revival tarries. Let's take time in the coming year to study from the Bible how to walk as Responsible Christians, Responsible Youngsters, Responsible Workers & Leaders, Responsible Spouses & Parents, Responsible Preachers, and Responsible Citizens & Authorities. We have heard enough of New Year Prophecies and New Year Promises. Let's now take solid New Year **Resolutions** and work on them tirelessly —

(C) New Year Resolutions

The Promise of Promises in the Bible is that we would partake of the "Divine Nature." The Bible calls this as the "exceedingly great and precious" promise (2 Pet 1:3,4). This Promise leads us to the Hope of Hopes that we the children of God shall become like Jesus when we meet Him face to face (1 Jn 3:1,2). All things God allows in our lives work towards this glorious goal (Rom 8:28,29). As such we must closely study from His Word the manifestations of His "divine nature." God has revealed Himself in the Bible through several characteristic names. We are called to be "followers of God" (Eph 5:1). We can make our New Year Resolutions on the basis of these Names for the fulfilment of the Promise of Promises in our life. Some of these Names occur only once in the Scriptures whereas others several times. I have given here the Names in the alphabetical order with the number of occurrences in parenthesis. I have picked up only a few verse references for each Name. Do turn to them —

(1) God of COMFORT (1) 2 Cor 1:3-5

I resolve to comfort those in suffering and problems with the same comfort I received from God when I went through difficult times.

(2) God of the FATHERS

(a) God of our Fathers (7) 2 Chr 20:6,12

I resolve to depend on the power and might of God instead of my own strength when I face threatening situations.

(b) God of their Fathers (20) 2 Chr 36:15,16

I resolve to take seriously God's warning which come to me through His messengers lest I come under His anger and be destroyed without remedy.

(c) God of your Father (9) 1 Chr 28:9

I resolve to follow and serve God with a loyal heart and a willing mind knowing that He searches my heart and understands all the intent of my thoughts.

- (d) God of your Fathers (16) 2 Chr 29:1-6
I resolve to cleanse my life and my Church throwing away all rubbish which is obnoxious in the sight of God.
- (3)** God of all FLESH (3) Num 16:22
I resolve to give myself to holy intercession before God so He might not consume all the people just because of a few rebels.
- (4)** God of GLORY (2) Acts 7:2 (Heb 11:9,10)
I resolve to loosen my attachment to earthly goods and set my mind on the glorious things of eternity.
- (5)** God of GODS (5) Dt 10:17,18
I resolve to show no partiality between the rich and the poor, but do all that's possible to bless the fatherless, widows, foodless and clotheless.
- (6)** God of HEAVEN (23) Ezra 5:11; Neh 1:4,5; 2:4,20
I resolve to commit myself to the rebuilding of the broken lives of individuals, families and Churches instead of criticizing them.
- (7)** God of HOPE (1) Rom 15:13
I resolve to be optimistic amidst uncertainties with the enablement of the Holy Spirit, and experience joy and peace through faith on God.
- (8)** God of HOSTS (4) Psa 80:7,14,19
I resolve to wait daily before God for a personal revival, renewal and restoration, and not try secular substitutes to make up deficiencies.
- (9)** God of ISRAEL (201) 1 Ki 8:23
(This Name occurs more number of times than any other.)
I resolve to keep the promises I've made to God, my spouse, family, friends and fellow-workers as God is faithful to His covenant.
- (10)** God of JUSTICE (2) Isa 30:15-18
I resolve to rest on God with quietness and confidence and not try to run ahead of Him who alone can vindicate me.
- (11)** God of the LIVING (3) Lk 20:38 (Acts 17:28)
I resolve to constantly remind myself of the fact that it is in God that I live and move and have my being.
- (12)** God of LOVE (1) 2 Cor 13:11
I resolve to live in peace with everyone and endeavour to maintain harmony at home, in the neighbourhood, in the Church and in the workspot through the reconciling love of God in Christ.
- (13)** God of PATIENCE (1) Rom 15:5-7
I resolve to be ever grateful to God for His patience towards me and in turn accept my fellow-believers, just as they are, in order to spread His Gospel with one-mindedness.
- (14)** God of PEACE (5) Rom 16:20; 1 Thess 5:23; Heb 13:20,21
I resolve to stay with joyous expectation that my God would ultimately lead me to smashing victory, total sanctification and absolute perfection.

(15) God of SALVATION

(a) God of my Salvation (7) Hab 3:17-19

I resolve to keep rejoicing in God for the gift of eternal Salvation even amidst earthly losses and physical sickness.

(b) God of our Salvation (6) Psa 85:4-7

I resolve to cry unto God during dry spells in my life and ministry so He would visit me again with revival blessing.

(16) God of TRUTH (3) Isa 65:16

I resolve to hate lying and exaggeration and keep a watch over my mouth so my words may be acceptable in God's sight.

Review these decisions periodically for self-examination. Do not be discouraged over failures. Get up and decide again. Be confident that God who has begun a good work in you would complete it until the Day of Jesus Christ (Phil 1:6).

*Wish you a Bible-based, God-honouring, Christ-centred
and Spirit-guided life in the New Year
with abounding Love, abundant Joy and abiding Peace!*