

Two Minute Warning III

Valley Center November 17, 2007

Kondaguram; Mudhalum; Yoraguntha; Kaphalapuram. These names probably mean nothing to you, but a couple of weeks ago they meant a great deal to me! These are the names of the train stops, in order, that precede the city of Cuddapah, which is where we needed to get off to be picked up by our Maranatha worker to go the project we would be working on.

Traveling in a foreign country can be challenging, especially when you have to get off the train at the right place, the signage may not be the best, it's 5:00 a.m., you have your hands full of luggage and the train is only going to stop there for a couple of minutes. It puts a lot of pressure on you to make sure you don't make a mistake!

That's why I asked a friend to give me the **names of the preceding stops**, so I could better be prepared to know when our destination would be coming up. That is the purpose of the great signs that God has given us in Scripture to know when His coming is near. We can know that the time for us to "get off" is close as we see the fulfillments of these prophecies.

We're looking at 10 of them, referenced in Revelation. We've noticed the Lisbon earthquake, the rise of America, the dark day and the moon turning to blood, the French Revolution and the close of the 1260 day/year prophecy, and the falling of the stars. There are three more in our list of ten.

Let me ask you this question, as we begin our study today. Does God deceive? No! Of course not. It's the devil who is the "father of lies," you say. And you're right! John 8:44. The Bible emphatically states that "It is impossible for God to lie." Hebrews 6:18.

Then let me ask you a corollary question. Be very careful with this one! Does God sometimes, for His own good reason, withhold for a time, certain information from His children? Does it happen sometimes that He allows His children to believe something to be true that is not and then later He opens their eyes to the real truth?

Two quick illustrations, one from the Old Testament and one from the New might bring this into focus. Do you remember the story of Abraham in Genesis 18, when he saw what he thought to be three weary travelers coming down the road? Were they really "three weary

travelers," or were they really visitors from heaven? In fact, it was the Lord and two of His angels that visited Abraham that day, but the Lord withheld, for His own good reason, the full truth for a limited time. Did God "deceive" Abraham? No, but He allowed him to perceive the visitors as common travelers for a short time. Perhaps it was a test for Abraham's faith and godliness, to see if he would show generosity and hospitality.

And what do we read in the New Testament? The day of our Lord's resurrection, He appeared to two disciples as they walked toward Emmaus. But they didn't recognize Him as the Lord at first, did they? The Bible says, "Their eyes were restrained so that they did not know Him." Luke 24:16. Do not fall into the trap of saying, "God tricked them." He is God! And God, in His infinite wisdom, had His own reason for doing it this way. They assumed He was a stranger in town Who wasn't aware of recent happenings. Again, the Lord withheld from their eyes the complete truth for a time. But that doesn't mean they weren't His children or that He didn't love them, did it? He had a plan and did things that way to suit His benevolent purpose.

Remember that principle, and keep these illustrations in mind as we now discuss the last three of 10 great signs of Christ's coming that took place between 1750 and 1850.

The last three of these 10 great signs take place within the context of the Millerite Movement, and so we need to take a few minutes and review what was happening in America and many places around the world in the early to mid 19th Century.

Who were the Millerites? They were those who held to the teachings of William Miller who was born in 1782 and raised in New England. He served ably in the War of 1812, and then moved his family to Low Hampton, northern New York where he took up farming, as well as holding various public offices such as sheriff and justice of the peace. But he had no inner peace himself.

Although raised in a religious home, William fell into association with a group of deists, whose beliefs tended to place great doubt on the Scriptures. But after struggling with dissatisfaction in his spiritual life, the Lord converted him in 1816. He found in Jesus the Savior he needed. He then applied himself to the study of the bible, to see if it indeed contained all the contradictions and errors he and his skeptic friends had boasted about. For a number of years William studied, sometimes well into the night. The Bible became his joy. He found it

not only contained the answers to his questions about redemption from sin, but also clearly taught things that were contrary to the popular doctrines of his day. He developed confidence in the prophecies of the Bible, and found that the Scriptures teach a literal and visible return of the Lord.

After two years of study, he came to the belief, from the descriptions given in prophecy that the day of Jesus' return must be near. He placed the greatest emphasis on the prophecy in Daniel 8:14: "Unto two thousand three hundred days, then shall the sanctuary be cleansed." William believed that the sanctuary was this earth, and its cleansing would take place at the Advent. He could find no beginning point for this prophecy in Daniel 8, but felt that the angelic explanation given in Daniel 9:24 provided the answer, and so he calculated that from the giving of the decree to restore Jerusalem (the third and effective decree given by Artaxerxes in 457 B.C., recorded in Ezra 7) would place the fulfillment of this prophecy in 1843, or about 25 years from that time.

This conclusion caused him no small agitation of spirit. Could it really be that the world would come to an end in a mere 25 years? Could it possibly be that a farmer, not a theologian, had made this discovery? Telling very few people of his views, he spent the next five years in critical analysis, taking apart and re-examining every part of his arguments to find any weaknesses.

Finding none, he was left with the conviction that he should tell the world of his findings. But he was a farmer, not a preacher! Being untrained and diffident, he was reluctant to do so. For several years he agonized with the deepening conviction of his study, yet paralyzed by his fears. Finally, in 1831 he wrote out his beliefs and gave a copy of his dissertation to a Christian minister friend of his named Andrus, who he expected would seize upon it and proclaim it. This, he supposed, would discharge his duty. But Andrus did nothing, and Miller still bore the burden of his convictions. Later that year in August, he made a covenant with the Lord, that if he were asked to present his views, he would accept the invitation, feeling quite safe in believing this would never happen. Who would ask a farmer to preach?

It is a "dangerous thing" to covenant with the all-knowing Lord! What Miller didn't know was that at the very time of his prayer, on the road at that very moment coming to his house was a young man on his way to ask him to preach the next day in Dresden, not far away, their pastor becoming suddenly ill. Miller was overcome by the timing

and providence of his prayer being answered and retired to a nearby grove to pray. As someone said, "A farmer went into the grove; a preacher came out". Miller graduated from plow to pulpit.

The Lord gave William freedom to speak boldly concerning Christ's return. The farmer turned preacher found that revivals were taking place as he presented his messages, and that soon he had so many invitations to speak he had to turn many down. In 1833 the Baptists (the church of which he was a member) granted him a preaching license, and over the course of the next five years, he spoke 800 times, all at his own expense, all by invitation.

Those who attended his meetings and accepted his views came from many different Christian denominations. Thousands walked or stepped from horse driven carriages to great open air or tent meetings that were held, where prophetic charts shared space on the platform with papier-mâché beasts, representing the animals of prophecy depicted in Daniel and Revelation. Other preachers, like Joshua V. Himes and Josiah Litch joined in the movement heralding the coming of the King. The number of those who believed the teachings of "Father Miller" was over a hundred thousand. Wide attention to the movement was given by the press.

Because number "8" on our list, the collapse of the Ottoman Empire was highlighted particularly by Josiah Litch, we need to spend a minute getting acquainted with him. Unlike Miller who was of Baptist background, Litch was a Methodist. He was the first preacher of note to join with Miller, which he did in 1838. In that same year Litch penned a 200 page book entitled, The Probability Of The Second Coming Of Christ About A.D. 1843. The Methodists conducted an investigation as to whether Litch would retain his employment with them or whether he should be dismissed, and concluded that his views, though different from the standard fare of the day, did not make necessary his expulsion. Rather, they granted him the opportunity to freely travel and preach the Millerite message, which he did with power and success.

Litch was a devout and earnest Bible student himself, and that same year in 1838, arrived at an understanding that the Turkish Empire would suffer a loss of power in 1840. This prediction was widely chronicled in both church papers and secular newspapers, and incited widespread interest in Bible prophecy.

Litch took his belief from the prophecy of Revelation 9:15-17, which he, along with notable Bible students such as Luther and Sir Isaac Newton (who wrote more about Bible prophecy than he did about science) identified as the rise and advancement of Islam.

It would be hard to imagine that with its prodigious effect upon Christianity for 13 centuries, Islam would not be touched upon in the Bible. When the Gospel spread throughout the world in the first century A.D., mighty strongholds of Christianity were planted in strategic places, encircling the Mediterranean. Alexandria in Egypt, Jerusalem, Antioch, Ephesus and Rome became centers of the faith of Jesus. To look at nearly all of these locations now would be to confess the tragic takeover of these hubs by Islam. The light of the Gospel was snuffed out and smothered by another set of beliefs, and among the religious groups of the world, converting a person to Christianity from Islam is probably the hardest.

Josiah Litch believed that the story of Islamic aggression was portrayed in the prophecies of Revelation 9. He saw in the symbolism of the locust army the mighty hordes of Moslem troops that crippled Christianity. It is interesting to compare the territories of the desert locust and Islam. They overlay each other in a most curious way. The "smoke from the bottomless pit" he understood as those teachings that hid the Gospel of Jesus, and replaced the Scriptures with another book, the Koran.

He found that two definite time periods were disclosed in this chapter. The first, the "five months" (9:5) he understood to be 150 literal years (taking a "day for a year" in symbolic prophecy), which he identified as beginning in July 27, 1299, when the first battle of the Ottoman Turks against the Byzantine Empire took place at Bapheum, near Nicomedia. In 1449, 150 years later, a new Byzantine emperor, Constantine Palaeologus had to request permission of the Turkish sultan Murad II before taking his throne, which signified the full domination of the Moslem influence.

The second period of time, the "hour, day, month and year" he again understood to be phrased in the "day for a year" format, and arrived at a length of time of 391 years and 15 days (360 years for the "year," plus 30 years for the "month," plus 1 year for the "day," plus 15 days for the "hour," which is $1/24^{\text{th}}$ of a year, or $1/2$ of a month). When added to the date of July 27, 1449, he arrived at August 11, 1840.

Beginning in 1838, Litch predicted that the power of the Ottoman Empire would soon be broken, and as August of 1840 approached, he chiseled his prediction to say that something would happen on August 11 of that year to signalize the collapse of Turkish authority.

In June of 1839 Mohammed Ali of Egypt, who had been a vassal of Turkey, rebelled against his overlord and overcame his navy in battle. A settlement was proposed, and England, Russia, Prussia, Austria and France became involved in the negotiations. Because of their interests in the Middle East, this tended to slow the process down a little. Finally in July of 1840, the Treaty of London was signed, specifying the terms of the agreement.

On August 11 of that year, Rifat Bey, the Turkish emissary, arrived in Alexandria with the terms of the agreement. Also on that day, the emissaries of the other nations received an inquiry from the sultan asking about a critical feature of the agreement affecting his empire. He was told that "provision would be made" concerning his request, but that it would be disclosed later. In other words, the Turks were no longer in the driver's seat. This, Litch believed, demonstrated that the power of Ottoman Empire had come to an end, and the prophecy had been literally fulfilled.

Because Litch had been so open in his analysis of the prophecy and so specific in the dates he proposed, it bolstered confidence in the other prophecies, yet unfulfilled, which were being considered.

That brings us to numbers 9 and 10 on our list. Number nine is the "sweet but bitter book." In the tenth chapter of Revelation we read, "And I saw still another mighty angel coming down from heaven, clothed with a cloud. And a rainbow was on his head, his face was like the sun, and his feet like pillars of fire. And he had a little book open in his hand. And He set his right foot on the sea and his left foot on the land. Then the voice which I heard from heaven spoke to me again and said, 'Go, take the little book which is open in the hand of the angel who stands on the sea and on the earth.' And I went to the angel and said to him, 'Give me the little book.' And he said to me, 'Take and eat it; and it will make your stomach bitter but it will be as sweet as honey in your mouth.' And I took the little book out of the angel's hand and ate it, and it was as sweet as honey in my mouth. But when I had eaten it, my stomach became bitter. And he said to me, 'You must prophesy again about many peoples, nations, tongues, and kings.'" Revelation 10: 1, 2, 8-11.

The mighty Angel whose face shines like the sun, whose feet are like pillars of fire, is Jesus. He is standing on the "sea" and on the "earth" indicating that this message would travel to places heavily populated as well as those not. What is the "little book," how was it sweet and how did it become bitter? As we mentioned before, Miller had based his understanding of the Lord's soon return on the prophecies of Daniel, particularly the 2300 day/year prophecy of Daniel 8:14. When the prophet had closed his ministry, the Lord told him, "But you, Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book until the time of the end; many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall increase." Daniel 12:4.

It was not the entire book of Daniel that was sealed, because information and reliable interpretation of the statue of Nebuchadnezzar's dream and the march of the nations portrayed in the menagerie of animals in chapter seven has been available even before the time of Christ. However, understanding regarding the longest time prophecy of the Bible, given in chapter 8, was very sketchy. But now, in the "time of the end," that is, following the end of the 1260 day/year prophecy, the spotlight was placed on this passage. It was through a study of this Scripture that Miller and others proclaimed their message of Christ's return. The "little book" of Daniel was "open", and the proclamation of the prophecies of Jesus' return brought unspeakable joy to everyone who would listen.

The advent movement was gaining momentum. Preachers from many different faiths had joined the swelling ranks and campmeetings with attendance of 5,000, 10,000 or even up to 25,000 people were frequent occurrences. The poet John Greenleaf Whittier attended a Millerite meeting: "Three or four years ago, on my way eastward, I spent an hour or two at a campground of the Second Advent in East Kingston. The spot was well chosen. A tall growth of pine and hemlock threw its melancholy shadow over the multitude, who were arranged upon rough seats of boards and logs. Several hundred—perhaps a thousand people—were present, and more were rapidly coming. Suspended from the front of the rude pulpit were two broad sheets of canvas, upon one of which was the figure of a man, the head of gold, the breast and arms of silver, the belly of brass, the legs of iron, and the feet of clay—the dream of Nebuchadnezzar. On the other were depicted the wonders of the Apocalyptic vision—the beasts, the dragons, the scarlet woman seen by the seer of Patmos."

Expectation of the Lord's soon return brought joy and happiness to the followers. Jesus was coming! Meetings were brightened by shouts of "hallelujah" and "hurray for Jesus," and believers continued their expressions of praise as they left in their carriages and wagons. Said one, who lived at that time, "It was the happiest year of my life." Can you imagine it! Believing that Jesus would soon come in the clouds of glory and sweep us to heaven!

What if we *really believed* that He was coming back soon! What if we *really believed* that soon there would be no more mortgage payments, no more pills, no more pain, no more tears and no more death? What if we *really believed* that there's no point of storing up gold down here, because soon we'll be walk on it up there? What if we *really believed* that soon we'll be with our Lord and enjoying the fellowship of His presence? Do you think the trials of this life would lessen? Do you think the topic of our conversations would be more on things heavenly than earthly?

This was the "sweet" experience of those who lived under Miller's tutelage. Whereas he had been content to preach that the Lord would return "about 1843," further refinements in the message were honed by his colleagues. It was concluded that since chronologists had not put in a "zero year" at the transition between B. C. and A. D., another year needed to be added, and 1844 became the year of expectation. Partway through that year, it was seen that since this prophecy was tied to the Yom Kippur of the Hebrew festivals, the Day of Atonement or Day of Judgment (it is still thought of that way by conservative Jews today), October 22, the Yom Kippur of 1844 should be the anticipated date.

That fall joy ran high as the days came closer. Crops were left in fields. What was the point of harvesting them? The great "Harvest" of the world was at hand! There were no "ascension robes" as myth makers describe. There was a solemn but profound peace and happiness that pervaded the group of watchers. Jesus was coming to take them home!

Of course, we know that October 22 came and went, and their hopes sunk with the setting of the sun. What bitter disappointment! The book that had been so "sweet" on their tongue was indeed "bitter" in their stomach.

The path of their disillusionment had been trod before. Hear the anguish of soul of those who trudged from Jerusalem to Emmaus just

days after their Master had been nailed to a Roman cross. Speaking to One they supposed to be a stranger, they said, "We were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel." Luke 24:21. What bitter irony!

Expectation had been high. Just *one week before*, a mere seven days ago, He had ridden on a donkey into the city amid shouts of "Hosanna." Now their hopes had been dashed on the rocks of Golgotha. They had such confidence in the prophecies! The time was "at hand." How could they have been so wrong? Did God not care for them?

But then the Stranger opened to their minds things in the Scripture they hadn't seen before. There was nothing inaccurate about the **date** of the prophecy; it was the **event** that they had misunderstood. Rightly understood, the prophecy had been fulfilled. God's Word hadn't failed! Something had happened, just not the way they expected. God did love them, and what took place was a vital part of His plan for them!

In a similar way, some of the Advent believers came to see that there was no failure of God's Word at this time also. There was nothing wrong with their dating computations. It wasn't the **date** that was wrong, it was the **event**. Rather than Christ coming to earth to cleanse it by fire, He was beginning a new phase of His ministry, to prepare a people for the great day of God. That portion of His work brought to view in Daniel 7 when the Ancient of Days would sit with tens of thousands ministering before Him, when "the court was seated and the books were opened" was to commence. This ministry of Jesus must conclude prior to His return, for the Scripture clearly teaches that those who are delivered are those "found written in the book." Daniel 12:1.

We say "some of the Advent believers" because of those who had expressed faith in Christ before October 22, many, perhaps the majority gave up their confidence completely and went back to their lives in the everyday world. Others revised the date, with no success. But others believed that this date was important, and that now it was time to declare, with certainty and conviction the message "the hour of His judgment has come." Revelation 14:7. Like the prophet in Revelation 10, they must "prophecy again" before nations and multitudes.

For His own good reasons God had allowed the message of the Millerites to go forward. He Himself had held His hand over their understanding, just as the disciples eyes were "restrained" on that Emmaus road. Attention like never before was given to the prophecies of Scripture. Focus on the return of Christ to this earth in glory was put in the spotlight.

So we have seen ten great signs of Christ's coming, all tied to specific dates, all brought to view in Revelation, all within a century between 1750 and 1850. Like ten great trumpets, they peal their message "I am coming soon." God's great work of redemption will close. He must deal with the virus of sin. This world can't last forever. His promise, though it seem to tarry, will come true.

What an exciting time to live in! What an honor to be alive in the last hours of this world's history! What privilege to share the Good News of Jesus so that others can hear of His love and His plan to save us!

Having the consciousness that Jesus is coming soon will change the way you think and live. "Everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure." I John 3:3. It's time to make our connection with Him sure. It's time to place our priorities and goals on the side of God and His work, and leave our "trivial pursuits" behind. Soon the glory of His presence will light our planet. What a day that will be!