

THE PREEMINENT SIGN OF THE LORD'S COMING: THE MANIFESTATION OF THE BODY OF CHRIST

BY JOHN PESTER

The timing of the coming of the Lord, coincident with the coming of the kingdom at the consummation of the age, was a subject of great interest to the disciples in the New Testament, and it continues to be of interest to Christians today. This interest is primarily focused on the outward fulfillment of prophetic events, such as the restoration of the nation of Israel,¹ the emergence of a European confederation,² the rise of Gog and Magog,³ the rebuilding of the Third Temple,⁴ and the ascent of a powerful, Satan-inspired world leader.⁵ In *The Late Great Planet Earth* Hal Lindsey reiterates this chain of prophetic events prior to the Lord's coming, saying, "Along with the revival of Israel and the return of the dispersed Jews, the rise of Russia, the formation of the Arab confederacy, China is helping to shape the Orient into its pattern of prophecy. History seems to be headed for its climactic hour" (87).

The fascination with and looking for the fulfillment of "climactic" prophetic signs by many Christians today are a continuation of the same traits that were exhibited by the disciples during the earthly ministry of Christ in Matthew 24:3: "On the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, Tell us, When will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming and of the consummation of the age?" The use of the singular word *sign* rather than *signs* stresses their interest in knowing the preeminent sign. In verses 4 through 7 the Lord answered, listing events related to His coming, including many being led astray by those saying, "I am the Christ"; the hearing of wars and rumors of wars; the rising up of nation against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; and the occurrence of famines and earthquakes in various places. In verses 9 through 12 the Lord spoke not of His coming but of further impact from the environment in relation to the preaching of the gospel, saying that the disciples would be delivered up to tribulation, killed, and hated by all the nations because of His name, with many being delivered up and hated by one another and with the love of many growing cold. In verse 14 the Lord's response is focused on events related to the preaching of a building gospel, not to His coming: "This gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole inhabited earth for a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come."

After the resurrection this fascination with prophetic signs has not abated among the Lord's past and present disciples as seen in Acts 1:6: "The ones who came together asked Him, saying, Lord, are You at this time restoring the kingdom to Israel?" Knowing that the restoration of the kingdom would be coincident with His coming, the Lord said, "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has set by His own authority" (v. 7). In verse 8 He explicitly focused on the disciples' being His witnesses: "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and unto the uttermost part of the earth."

That only the Father knows the time of the Lord's coming means that expending much energy on pursuits related to searching for the fulfillment of prophetic signs, even of ones mentioned