

# You Are Part of God's Eternal Plan

## Ephesians 3:11

If you are into "Been there, done that, and got the t-shirt" I hope you purchased "I Survived the Judgment Day in 2011" t-shirt for \$20.40 rather than the "Rapture Ready" t-shirt for \$19.20.

*Are you ready for Doomsday on May 21?* I asked our waitress on Tuesday. My wife and I overheard our waitress and another waitress discussing the May 21 prediction as they watched one of the 5000 billboard (this one on wheels) roll by the Ruby Tuesday. In her conversation, she said, *"There is a part of me that does not believe Saturday is the day of the rapture, but there is also a part of me worried."* I later had an opportunity to witness to her and set the record straight about date-setting.

This is not the first time Harold Camping has set a date. Back in 1994 he predicted in his book *1994* that Christ would return in September. Of course, Camping later said it was simply a miscalculation. This time he was confident. Here is his response in an interview with New York News & Feature:

The interviewer asked: "If six o'clock rolls around and there are no major earthquakes, are you going to start to get worried?"

Camping replied: "It's going to happen. It's going to happen. I don't even think about those kind of issues. The Bible is not — God is not playing games. I don't even want to think about that question at all. *It is going to happen.*"

He is correct that the Bible is not playing games. But Camping is playing games with the Bible. His prediction is based on irrational interpretations of dates in the Bible. First, he claims that the flood occurred in 4990 B.C. and because Genesis 7:10-11 says "it came to pass after seven days the waters of the flood were upon the earth" Camping connects this verse to 2 Peter 3:8, which says "that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years." From Camping's website, he concludes:

*Therefore, with the correct understanding that the seven days referred to in Genesis 7:4 can be understood as 7,000 years, we learn that when God told Noah there were seven days to escape worldwide destruction, He was also telling the world there would be exactly 7,000 years (one day is as 1,000 years) to escape the wrath of God that would come when He destroys the world on Judgment Day. Because the Holy Infinite God is all-knowing, He knows the end from the beginning. He knew how sinful the world would become.*

In 1 Thessalonians 4:17, the apostle Paul wrote one of the greatest statements on the coming of Christ. In his statement, Paul sets no dates. Paul set no dates because he did not know when Christ would return. Theologians refer to the doctrine of the imminent return of Christ i.e., the coming of Christ can occur any moment. There are no signs to be fulfilled. Paul thought the Lord could return in his life: "Then **we** (Paul included himself in this group anticipating the coming of Christ) who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds" (1 Thessalonians 4:17). In 1 Thessalonians 5, Paul did say that Christ would come "as a thief in the night." Again, no dates. No May 21st at 6:00 p.m.

**Just as God sent Christ at His first coming "in the fullness of time" (Galatians 4:4), God will send His Son the next time and no date-setter will know the day nor hour.**

Harold Camping mis-predicted the coming of Christ because only God knows when Christ will come. The coming of Christ is part of God's overarching Plan settled in eternity past.

Paul refers to this eternal plan in Ephesians 3:11. Paul identifies it as "the eternal purpose" or plan. Notice "purpose" is singular. God has only one plan, with many parts and persons involved, but only one overarching plan. "There was never a moment when God had a blank mind or a time when God's plan with all of its parts was not fully determined. He never finally made up his mind' about anything. He has always had the plan." (Robert L. Reymond. *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1998, 463).

What God planned in eternity, He accomplished in Christ: "According to the eternal purpose or plan which he purposed or accomplished in Christ" (Ephesians 3:11).

### ***What Has God Eternally Planned?***

#### **1. God Eternally Planned Our Salvation**

In Ephesians 1:3-4, Paul burst out in praise for this eternal plan that was accomplished in Christ. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: According as he has chosen us in him before the foundation of the earth." Paul turned this doctrine into a doxology.

As Paul faced death, he exhorted Timothy not to be ashamed of God, "Who has saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose (Plan) and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the ages began" (2 Timothy 1:9).

This does not eliminate the necessity of faith as Paul wrote in 2:8-9. Human responsibility and God's sovereignty are like two guard rails.

#### **2. God Eternally Planned the Death of Christ**

Jesus spoke of this part of God's eternal plan in Luke 22:22 on Thursday evening before His death the next morning. Just as Paul faced death with this truth on his mind so did Christ. "And truly the Son of man goes, as it was determined: but woe unto that man by whom he is betrayed." Christ's death for our sins was determined by God, according to Peter before the foundation of the world (1 Peter 1:18-20). Noticed the eternal plan of God does not eliminate human responsibility. God determined the death of Christ for our sins but also held Judas accountable for rejecting God's plan.

Peter in his sermon on the day of Pentecost used the same word "determine" that Christ used in Acts 2:23 and also held the Jews accountable for crucifying Christ.

Christ in John 3:18 stressed the sinner's responsibility to believe: "He that believes on him is not condemned: but he that believes not is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God."

### **3. God Eternally Planned the Future**

Paul refers again to God's Grand Scheme in Ephesians 1:9-10 for the future. God has planned a time when He will "gather or unite all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him." We call this time of universal unity the Millennial reign of Christ.

God's plan for Israel was established in eternity according to Romans 9:11-14 where Paul uses the word "purpose" or plan which was determined before the birth of Jacob. Is God unrighteous in choosing Israel and not choosing another nation? No! Paul is defending the righteousness of God. God choose Israel to be a light to the Gentiles according to Isaiah.

God's plan for Israel is laid out in Romans 9, 10, and 11. Israel's past is presented in chapter 9: God choose Israel according to His eternal plan. In Romans 10, Israel is presently rejected by God because Israel rejected the Messiah. But in Romans 11, Israel has a future, at the Second Coming of Christ "all Israel will be saved."

### **4. God Eternally Planned Your Daily Circumstances**

In Romans 8:28, Paul used his favorite word for the eternal plan of God, the word "purpose." Paul reminds us that not only did God plan from eternity our salvation, the death of Christ for our sins, and the future, but our daily circumstances, both good and bad.

On Friday, a young pastor friend and his wife asked me to renew their wedding vows in a very private ceremony in the church they were married in 10 years ago. Part of the ceremony was the exchange of vows where each vowed once again their commitment to each other. I started with the husband: "Michael, do you take this woman whom you hold by the right hand, to be your lawful and wedded wife; is it your firm intention and do you solemnly promise to love her, to cherish her in sickness and in health, and whether you are rich or poor, or whether it shall be for better or for worse, absolutely forsaking all others, keeping yourself unto her so long as you both shall live?" He responded, "I do."

God has made that commitment to you. He has promised to love you and cherish you in sickness not just in health, in poverty not just wealth, for worse not just for better. He will never forsake you.