

Did Jesus Know the Time of the Last Day?

Written by K B Napier

Wednesday, 28 January 2015 14:49

This query came about at one of our Sunday meetings. Apparently Islamic debaters are asking the question of Christians, in an effort to claim Jesus was/is God. They ask, if Jesus was God how did He not know the time of the last day?

My first answer is – NEVER debate scripture with anyone. My second is – NEVER argue scripture with Muslims or any other cult member. Scripture is to be declared, not debated! My third is a repetition of a 'rule' of interpretation I have given before: ALWAYS begin a study with what is plainly taught in scripture; NOT with what others say, but with what God says.

Then, test everything else against what is plainly known – one cannot contradict the other! This will prevent going off at a tangent. And... NEVER let a cultist dictate the course of an argument... divert them and use your own questions and comments. Like Jehovah's Witnesses, they usually stop and start again! This is because what they are saying is indoctrinated into them time and again. Now, let me offer an answer for Christians only, which will NOT give a final answer...

Matthew 24:35

"But of that day and hour knoweth no [man], no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only."

Mark 13:32

"But of that day and [that] hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father."

The Matthew text says that neither Man nor angel knows when the end will come. The Mark text says the same thing but includes "neither the Son". We are told in 1 Corinthians 2:11 that no man can know anything of a spiritual nature unless he has the Holy Spirit within. And, the angels do not know the time of the end because they are created beings, who, like humans, must be told whatever they know, by God. So, this narrows the query down to Jesus Christ (the Son) only. Did the Son know the time of the end and of His own return?

In Matthew we note that Jesus *as God* must have known the day of the end, for He gives us

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details of things that *precede* the end. Obviously, if the end follows these signs, then we just watch for the signs. We may not know in advance what the time will be, but we will know reasonably well, when the last sign comes about. This means Jesus, too, must know, but He chose to 'keep us on our spiritual toes' for our own good (but there is more to it).

The last day will come suddenly, even though, as in Noah's time, everyone was warned about their coming fate. They ignored the warnings, and realised the warning was true only when it was too late. In the same way the last day will come suddenly. Really, the exact day and time is not altogether relevant, for it will be sudden and unexpected anyway!

But, we WILL know the *approximate* time, just as Noah knew that once he had completed the building of the ark, the catastrophe would come. What mattered to Noah was NOT the exact time and day, but the fact that he entered the ark with the animals at the right time, and waited for the end to come. Then, it did not matter what the exact time and day would be, for they were safe.

Jesus added this to the end of the Matthew account, in verse 44: "*Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh.*"

The Mark text repeats the same kind of warning and adds that "neither the Son, but the Father" knows the exact day and hour of the last day. Does this mean Jesus, as God, did not know something, or maybe Jesus *as Man* did not know? Even after Jesus died there were men who taught that Jesus was ignorant of some things. The men were called 'Agnoetae' (e.g. such as Arians); they were heretics who denied omniscience! So – why listen to their useless queries that have as their base the idea that Christ was not God? Their aim is not belief, but destruction of truth.

The argument then followed that, being God, Christ could not be ignorant of anything at all. However – they said – the God-part of Christ did not pass on information to the Man-part, and this is how it is possible to say that "Christ grew in wisdom" (Luke 2:52). Personally, I have no problem with this, and can accept that the relationship between the Father and the Son may indeed be too complex for the human mind to understand. This is not an excuse, but an acknowledgement of what scripture may be saying on the issue. In other words, God knows everything, but when joined to mankind, what God knows may not pass to the Man, though the Man is the Messiah. If this is what the text means, then I accept it.

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We DO know, however, that Christ knew the approximate time, as His following statement shows, re the returning master of the house. This apparent non-knowing did not bother Christ, so why does it bother us? Based on just two words, we cannot claim that Christ did not know anything with reference to the end time, only that we do not understand how it can be so. As always, it is the cults who major on seemingly unanswerable conundrums, in an attempt to try to trip up Christians! They completely ignore the huge fallacies and errors in their own systems of belief.

One answer may be, then, that God knows everything, but in this one text Christ (as Man but not as God?) says He does not know the specific time of the last day. This neither bothers me nor causes me to think less of Him as God. This would then be a case where God deliberately restricted His own self, for reasons we are not given.

In a similar way we know God can do whatever He likes... but, He has also restricted what He can and cannot do, by His own character. So, for example, God cannot lie, even though, by right of His divinity, He COULD lie if He wanted to. Yet, He chose not to lie and to restrict His activity. (Therefore, He CANNOT lie!). This does not make Him less than God. If anything it proves His power is absolute, for HE can control even His own character! In like manner perhaps we can say the Son 'does not know', because of self-restriction.

Now let us extend this short study...

In Matthew 25:12, Jesus said this: "I do not know you". This did not mean He literally did not know the person, but that He did not acknowledge him to be one of His guests... they had no connection. The conclusion (as an assumption) I come to is that Jesus DID know the time of the end, but was saying that as the Son it was not His place to divulge the time to mortals, when even the angels did not know. Thus, He DID know the time of the end but refused to tell people, who, He said, must wait and live holy lives in readiness. Jesus gave far too many details about other aspects of God's plans to lead us to say He did not know a very specific fact. Would it not be odd that as God He did not know only ONE detail?

Also, Jesus was both Man and God. He was not a dichotomy, but an unified Person. This is called an 'Hypostatic Union'. So, both as Man and God He knew the same things. And, as the Messiah, He knew the will and mind of the Father, for the Father is God, just as the Son and the Spirit are God. It would be impossible for one Person not to know what the other Persons knew. If we say that God is divided in knowledge, then we could easily claim that each Person in the godhead had His 'secrets'; and if there were these secrets, how many did each have? No, it

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becomes absurd!

The only way I can view this is that God deliberately restricted His own knowledge, for His own reasons, on this one matter, just as God restricts what he can and cannot do by reason of His character. A self-restriction rather than a lack of ability.

We are also told that “in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form.” (Colossians 2:9). Note that? “ALL the fullness”. Some say Jesus was not omniscient until after He was resurrected. But, we cannot prove this assertion. We CAN say that Jesus said “I and my father are one” (John 10:30). Does this not confuse the issue further? No, it does not. Jesus plainly said He and the Father are One, or ‘the same Person’, God, and sharing all godly things. So, it is not possible for Christ to be ignorant of the day of the end, or of His own return! A little later, in verse 38, Jesus again repeats the claim: “the Father is in me, and I in him”.

If Christ and the Father are the same, how is it possible for one not to know what the other knows? It is *impossible*, and yet, the Son makes an exception in the verse. The argument gets bigger in 1 John 5:7, where “these three are One” (Father, Son and Holy Spirit). It is not possible for one to act without knowledge of the other and without the consent and will of each. They acted, and still act, in unity. This means the Son’s *apparent* lack of knowledge on one matter was consensual and of God. In scripture we can explain so many things... but not this.

My conclusion, then, is that as God, Christ knew what the Father knew. But, He did not wish to take the onus of the end time from the Father (and thus Himself) by telling people when the end would come. Whether or not this means He had no actual knowledge, we cannot tell.

The Son may have said what He said because of human nature – if a teenager knows the exact time and date his parents return home, he will leave the house a mess until a few hours beforehand, and will only then clean up! This is why Jesus said a similar thing – instead of wondering when the end would be, the apostles must remain vigilant and holy, as if the end were to come right now. That is, while mere mortals concentrate on ‘neither the Son’ the Son concentrates instead on how the apostles (and we) should act. Anything else is a diversionary tactic playing into the hands of unbelievers.

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If you think my answers are not enough, well, that is not my problem. I believe totally in Christ's 'God-ness'. Anything He said MUST be true... and He said He was God and was one with the Father. Therefore, He knew everything as the Father knew everything. But, AS THE SON, He would not give the date of His return (for whatever reason and by whatever mechanism). For me, that ends the matter. The arguments and frustrations of unbelievers and cults are not my concern! I believe my answers are acceptable and reasonable given the available scriptural information. That they might not be perfect is not the issue, for I can only work with the texts given.

Return to Mark 13:32

"But of that day and [that] hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father."

Note that the word 'knoweth' is not the usual *ginosko*, but the verb *eidō*. It is a perfect tense with a present meaning... what is known right now, with complete or full knowledge. Thus, in this text no man has this present knowledge, though he may know that the end will come after certain signs, as Jesus taught. Similarly, the angels can only know what God reveals to them. Obviously, created beings cannot have a perfect knowledge of anything, let alone what will happen in the future, but how does it apply to Christ, Who is God?

This text cannot mean the Son did not *absolutely* know something – especially one particular fact amongst so many... Jesus knew the exact signs that would precede His coming again, and this implies strongly that if He knew, say, the last sign, then He also knew that the NEXT sign would be His coming again!

Rather, Jesus is telling His apostles not to sleep, or to let down their guard, but to always be in an attitude of waiting expectantly... He would not give them the exact date and time, for otherwise, like so many, they would be lax until just before He came! Jesus did not need to pay attention to the fact, but the apostles did. The term appears to mean that as Christ did nothing without the Father, and the Father did not wish men to know the exact time of the Second Coming, then the Son could not reveal it, even if He had the knowledge (re. Archbishop Tillotson).

Bear in mind that the writers of the Gospels were not fools who wrote independently of each other in reckless fashion. If anything said by Mark was contended, we would know it. But, it was not, so verse 32 stands. Christ, too, was not stupid, but was and is God. He would not say what

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He said without sound reason. It is our lack of understanding that is at fault, not what was said by either Christ or Mark. We lack understanding simply because there is insufficient information given by Christ. And why should He explain Himself to any man on any particular point?

To me, Christ was speaking consistently with His adopted humanity, as in Philippians 2:7, when Jesus "*made Himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men.*" That Muslims or any other cultists do not like or accept this as an answer is irrelevant... they are enemies of Christ anyway and do not want to hear truth! Did it mean Christ laid aside one part of His godhood-knowledge? My reply is "Why not?" I can accept that, because it means Christ, as God, denied Himself a certain facility for His own purpose, just as God inhibits His own actions because of His character..

Thus, His deliberate denial of knowledge would be His divine prerogative and not a *failure* of knowledge. Christ just pointed to the Father, Who Himself must reveal the date and time. This is consistent in the whole ministry of Christ, Who always directed people to the source of what Christ said and did – the Father. None of us can understand this relationship or the reason why the Son did this; it is a fact of scripture that has no given answer. We do not know the answer!

One should also note the peculiar division in the verse, which is certainly not a normal grammatical one. Indeed, it may even be termed 'awkward'. Jesus begins with man not knowing, then the angels, when man is made lower than the angels. Jesus then says He did not know *as the Son*, He being uncreated and greater than created beings, including the angels, and equal to the Father as God. In a very real sense there is therefore a break in declared wisdom, for He does not link 'angel' and Himself, but leaves it unsaid.

There is, then, between reference to angelic knowledge and Himself, a great gulf of non-explanation. We are unable to delve into this gulf to bring out a meaning, and yet we have the vast accumulation of knowledge that the Son is God, and that as God He knew, and still knows, everything. Thus, we can go no further in this quest for an answer, but it should not be a bother to the saved soul.

In the end, then, we can only say "we do not know what it means". It is our path to simply accept what is said, but never to diminish the godhood or the Son. That cultists refuse to accept this is not our problem, and we should not be drawn into fruitless argument. Christ said He was God, and the rest of scripture points to this fact, and that is enough.

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