

HAL LINDSEY'S PROPHETIC JIGSAW PUZZLE

**FIVE PREDICTIONS
THAT FAILED!**

Samuele Bacchiocchi

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DEDICATED
to my loving wife, Anna,
whose love and encouragement
constantly motivate me
to greater service
for the Lord

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PREFACE

Very seldom do non-fiction books reach the best-selling list, and if they do, they do not remain on such a list for very long. A notable exception are Hal Lindsey's books on End-time prophecies. His first book, *The Late Great Planet Earth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970), is touted by the publisher as "the bestselling non-fiction book of the decade, selling more than 18 million copies worldwide."

Other books written by Lindsey have enjoyed similar popularity. For example, *The 1980's: Countdown to Armageddon* (New York: Bantam Books, 1980) has been, as stated on the cover, for "over 20 weeks on the *New York Times* best seller list."

Lindsey's books are popular not merely because they are written in a clear, crispy, journalistic style, but primarily because they predict with astonishing boldness the precise pattern of events which are to occur before the end of the 1980s, the time when the battle of Armageddon will take place, bringing to an end the present history of this world.

The End-time scenario portrayed by Lindsey is duplicated with modification in a whole spate of similar publications which range in size from a 46-page picture book entitled, *The Beast* (Chino, California: Chick Publications, 1966) to a 490-page detailed prognostications by William Dankenbring, *The Last Days of the Planet Earth: A Survival Guide to the End of the World* (Altadena, California: Triumph Publishing Co., 1981).

The reason for the popularity of this "Christian apocalyptic" literature is not hard to find. The uncertainty prevalent in the world today, fueled by a host of social, political and economic, ecological factors which threaten human survival, drives people to look for something to hang on. While some turn to horoscopes or to Jeanne Dixon for light on the future, others turn to "Christian prophets" such as Hal Lindsey who uses the Bible as a crystal ball to forecast the immediate future.

The scholarly community in general chooses to ignore this contemporary "apocalyptic" literature, viewing it as unworthy of consideration. Such a position, however, hardly helps the millions of Christians who have built their hopes for the future on such sensational but senseless literature. Thus,

out of a sense of moral obligation toward sincere but misled Christians, I have decided to write this booklet. I have chosen to analyze Lindsey's prophetic jigsaw puzzle simply because he is the best popularizer of the widespread school of prophetic interpretation, known as dispensationalism.

My aim is twofold. First, to show the fallacy of Lindsey's prophetic scenario by exposing five of his specific predictions which have failed to come to pass. Second, to help believers understand the true nature and function of End-time prophecies.

This booklet has grown out of an article which I wrote for *Ministry*, at the request of its editor, J. Robert Spangler. To the latter I wish to express my appreciation for the invitation and inspiration to write on Hal Lindsey. A special thanks also to Dr. Leona Running and to Mrs. Sue Schwab for proofreading the manuscript and making valuable suggestions.

The content of this booklet represents a brief summary of two chapters of my larger study entitled, *The Advent Hope for Human Hopelessness*, which was released in February 1986. The reader is recommended to read this larger study for a fuller understanding of the certainty, imminence and relevance of the Second Advent.

Chapter I

SPYING

THE FUTURE

To know the exact time when important events are expected to occur is a burning human desire. To satisfy such a desire, we listen daily to a host of forecasters who predict, with more or less accuracy, when to expect a snowstorm or tornado, an eclipse, a lunar landing, an economic upturn or downturn, the end of a war, etc. Knowing in advance when a major event will occur gives a sense of preparedness and control over the future.

The Date of the Second Advent. One of the greatest desires cherished by many Christians throughout the centuries has been that of knowing the exact time and circumstances of their Lord's Return. To satisfy such a desire, well-meaning Christians from Montanus in the second century to Hal Lindsey in the twentieth century have attempted to determine from the Scriptures the exact timetable of events leading to the Second Advent.

Martin Luther himself, though he strongly condemned Michael Stifel for fixing the date of the end of the world at 8 a.m. on October 19, 1553, worked frantically in 1530 to finish his translation of the Bible because he believed Christ would return before he could complete it. "For it is certain from the Holy Scriptures," he wrote, "that we have no more temporal things to expect. All is done and fulfilled: the Roman Empire is at an end; the Turk has reached his highest point; the pomp of papacy is falling away and the world is cracking on all sides almost as if it would break and fall apart entirely."¹

It is not surprising that new attempts to derive from Biblical prophecies the exact time and circumstances of Christ's Return are intensifying today. The approach of the ominous year 2000, coupled with the ever-increasing threat to human survival posed by such factors as international tensions, social disorders, natural and man-made disasters, nuclear armaments, population explosion, pollution, and depletion of natural resources, leads many people to seek for light on the future.

While some people today hope to find such a light by turning to horoscopes, to Jeanne Dixon, or to authors like George Orwell, others turn to “Christian prophets” such as Hal Lindsey, who uses Biblical prophecies as a crystal ball to predict the time and the events leading to Armageddon and Christ’s Return.

Scholarly studies generally ignore the capricious interpretation of Biblical prophecies of authors such as Hal Lindsey. To do so, however, means to fail to help the millions of people who have been misled by this kind of literature. Thus, I have decided to write this booklet, not for the pleasure of hunting heresy, but rather out of a sense of duty to help many Christians understand “that no prophecy of scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation” (2 Pet 1:20).

Attention will be given primarily to Hal Lindsey’s imaginative prophetic jigsaw puzzle (as he likes to call it)² of end-time events, because he is the top popularizer of the widely accepted school of prophetic interpretation known as dispensationalism.

Objectives. My immediate objective is to help readers see for themselves how time has already proved Lindsey’s prophetic jigsaw puzzle to be fiction rather than fact. Rather than engaging the reader in a lengthy analysis of Lindsey’s arbitrary method of prophetic interpretation, consideration will be given primarily to five specific predictions which have failed to take place.³

The task of proving the fallacy of Lindsey’s predictions is facilitated by the fact that, contrary to most dispensational writers, Lindsey has assigned rather precise dates to his timetable of End-time events. It may come as a surprise and disappointment to many to discover that five key pieces of Lindsey’s jigsaw puzzle have failed to fall into place.

My ultimate objective is to help readers understand some of the vital functions of the prophetic Advent signs. To this question I have devoted the last two chapters of this booklet. It is my fervent hope that this brief study may encourage many people to look forward, not to the occurrence of *impersonal events*, but rather to the coming of our *personal Savior* Jesus Christ, who is our “blessed hope” (Titus 2:13).

If this booklet arouses your interest in a clearer and fuller understanding of End-time prophecies, then I would urge you to read my fuller treatment of this vital subject, entitled *The Advent Hope for Human Hopelessness*. The latter represents several years of dedicated research on numerous aspects of the Advent Hope which are particularly relevant to our life and time.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 1

1. Quoted in Stephen Travis, *I Believe in the Second Coming of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, 1982), p. 118; also in T. F. Torrance, *Kingdom and Church* (Edinburgh and London, 1956), p. 20. For a brief survey of date-setters, see Robert A. Clouse, "The Danger of Mistaken Hopes," in *Handbook of Biblical Prophecy*, eds. Carl E. Armerding and W. Ward Gasque (Grand Rapids, 1977), pp. 27-39.

2. See, for example, Hal Lindsey with C. C. Carlson, *The Late Great Planet Earth* (Grand Rapids, 1970), pp. 42, 58, 80, 87. Henceforth referred to as *Planet*.

3. This booklet represents a brief summary of chapters 7 and 15 of my book *The Advent Hope for Human Hopelessness*. The reader is referred to this study for a more exhaustive analysis of this subject.

Chapter 2

LINDSEY'S SCHOOL OF INTERPRETATION

Originators of totally new ideas are few and far between. This is true for all disciplines, including that of prophetic interpretation. What at first may appear as a startling new interpretation of End-time prophecies, under closer scrutiny is revealed to be a repetition with modifications of an older view. Lindsey's prophetic scenario is no exception, as it is largely derived from the school of prophetic interpretation known as dispensationalism.

I. DISPENSATIONALISM

Origin. The origin of dispensationalism is generally traced back to John Nelson Darby (1800-1882), a leader of the Plymouth Brethren who rejected the idea of the *unity* of the covenants, teaching instead that redemptive history is divided in *distinct dispensations* or segments of time, in each of which God has been working with humanity in a different way.¹

Applied to the future, the dispensational system assumes that the Christian Church is not the continuation of God's Old Testament people, but rather an "interruption" or an "intercalation" that began at Pentecost and will terminate when Christ comes invisibly and secretly to take away believers out of this world to heaven. This event, which is known as the Secret Rapture, is believed to take place seven years before the visible and glorious coming of Christ. The Rapture marks the end of the dispensation of the Church and the beginning of the restoration of the Old Testament dispensation of Israel.

Extent. The stronghold of dispensationalism today is the Dallas Theological Seminary, where Lindsey himself received his theological training. The outlook of the Dallas Seminary is clearly discernible in Lindsey's books where he plugs the literature of his former professors.

An estimated two hundred Bible institutes, including the Chicago Moody Bible Institute, teach dispensationalism in principle.² Its influence extends beyond North America to several other countries, as indicated by 31 foreign editions of Lindsey's books.

The Prophetic Role of Modern Israel. The center of the entire End-time prophetic scenario is, for dispensationalists, the modern State of Israel. Leon J. Wood, a leading dispensationalist, explicitly states: “The clearest sign of Christ’s return is the modern state of Israel.”³ The official establishment of Israel on May 14, 1948, with David Ben-Gurion’s Declaration of Independence, is regarded as *the* End-time sign which started the prophetic countdown to Armageddon and to the Second Advent.

II. LINDSEY’S CONTRIBUTIONS

Popularizer. The credit for popularizing the above view on a global scale must be given to Hal Lindsey. His popularly written books are selling by the millions at the breathless rate usually associated with hamburgers. “Seldom,” aptly writes John M. Mulder, “has a ‘prophet’ been accorded such honor, or rather sales, in his own land.”⁴

Lindsey’s popularity extends well beyond his own land, since *The Late Great Planet Earth* is said to have sold over 30 million copies in 31 foreign editions.⁵ “When Hal Lindsey appeared on television in the Netherlands,” writes Dr. Cornelis Vanderwaal, “it became clear that even sober Calvinists welcomed his dispensationalism with open arms. His predictions about the future were accepted and believed.”⁶

The return of the Jews to Palestine and the establishment of the State of Israel are, to say the least, most remarkable events. So it is not surprising that many Christians and Jews see in these events the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies.

It is quite possible *personally* to believe in the right of the Jewish people to the land of Palestine and in God’s providential leading in the establishment of the State of Israel, but such a belief, as I have shown in my book *The Advent Hope for Human Hopelessness*, cannot be legitimately grounded on Biblical prophecies.

Date-setter. Lindsey has contributed to making dispensationalism not only more popular but also more sensational, by giving specific dates to its End-time scenario. The fixed starting point of Lindsey’s End-time prophetic scenario is 1948, the year of the establishment of the State of Israel. He views this event as the key piece of his prophetic jigsaw puzzle and calls it “the most important prophetic sign to herald the era of Christ’s return.”⁷

Lindsey draws this conclusion from the parable of the “fig tree” given by Christ in His Olivet Discourse: “From the fig tree learn its lesson:

as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. So also, when you see all these things, you know that he is near, at the very gates” (Matt 24:32-33).

The parable of the fig tree contains, according to Lindsey, “*an extremely important time clue*”⁸ to calculate the approximate date of Christ’s visible Return. He finds the time clue in the reference to the putting forth of the first leaves by the fig tree. This imagery, for Lindsey, represents the restoration of national Israel which occurred “on 14 May 1948 . . . when the Jewish people, after nearly 2,000 years of exile, under relentless persecution, became a nation again.”⁹ According to Lindsey, Christ referred to this specific event to “indicate that He was ‘at the door,’ ready to return.”¹⁰ To further delimit the nearness of His Return, Christ then said: “Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away till all these things take place” (Matt 24:34).

Lindsey’s Date of Christ’s Return. “This generation,” for Lindsey, refers to “the generation that would see the signs—chief among them the rebirth of Israel.”¹¹ In an interview conducted in 1977 by Ward Gasque and published in *Christianity Today*, Lindsey emphatically stated his conviction that “Matthew 24:34 teaches that ‘This generation’ means the generation which sees Israel (the fig tree of verse 32) back in the land of Palestine—this is the chief sign—and sees all the other signs of Matthew 24 being fulfilled.”¹²

Since “a generation in the Bible is something like forty years, then,” Lindsey predicted in 1970, “within forty years or so of 1948, all these things could take place.”¹³ By “all these things” Lindsey clearly means all the events leading to and including Christ’s Return. To give support to this prediction, he adds: “Many scholars who have studied Bible prophecy all their lives believe that this is so.”¹⁴

What this means is that, according to Lindsey’s prophetic scenario, within the forty years of the last generation which began in 1948, that is, by 1988, all the prophecies pointing to Christ’s Return must be fulfilled.¹⁵

The same conviction is expressed by other dispensational writers like David Webber and Noah Hutchings who explicitly state: “Forty is the Jewish number for testing. Since Israel was refounded as a nation in 1948, she has been tested like no other nation has been tested before . . . The Bible indicates that Israel will be tested until the Messiah comes. Forty years from 1948 is 1988.”¹⁷

This conviction is also the underlying assumption of Lindsey’s film, named after his book, *The Late Great Planet Earth*. In his review of this

film, Gary Wilburn notes that its fundamental assumption is that: "The world must end within one generation from the birth of the state of Israel. Any opinion of world affairs that does not dovetail with this prophecy is dismissed."¹⁸

The same conviction is expressed by the very title of Lindsey's book *The 1980's: Countdown to Armageddon* (1980). In the preface, Lindsey writes: "Many people will be shocked by what will happen in the very near future. *The decade of the 1980s could very well be the last decade of history as we know it.*"¹⁹ Since we are already in 1987, it is legitimate to verify if, to borrow Lindsey's own favorite imagery, all the key pieces of his prophetic jigsaw puzzle are rapidly falling into place according to his timetable.

In the next two chapters we will endeavor first to identify the key pieces of Lindsey's prophetic jigsaw puzzle (chapter 3) and then to examine five of the important pieces which have failed to fall into place (chapter 4).

This exposè of Lindsey's mistaken predictions is not intended to dampen hope in a soon-Coming Savior. My only contention is that the time of Christ's Return is unpredictable and consequently it could be sooner or later than Lindsey predicted. Expectancy and readiness for the Return of our Lord must be based not on a preconceived timetable of End-time events but on the certainty of His promise, which is confirmed by the constant signs of divine grace and human rebellion.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 2

1. The most systematic and apologetic presentation of dispensationalism is given by H. S. Chafer, in *Systematic Theology*, 8 vols. (Dallas: Dallas Seminary Press, 1947). John F. Walvoord, the president of Dallas Theological Seminary, has developed dispensationalism in the following books: *Israel in Prophecy* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1962); *The Millennial Kingdom* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1974); *The Rapture Question* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1957); *The Return of the Lord* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1971).

2. For a most perceptive analysis of the dispensational principles of prophetic interpretation, see Hans K. LaRondelle, *The Israel of God in Prophecy* (Berrien Springs, Michigan: Andrews University Press, 1983).

3. Leon J. Wood, *The Bible and Future Events* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1973), p. 18.

4. John M. Mulder, "The Terminal Generation," *Theology Today*, 33 (January 1977): 443.
5. Lindsey himself expressed his surprise at the overwhelming response from readers of *The Late Great Planet Earth*. He wrote, "The interest also proved to have no geographical boundaries as the book was translated into 31 foreign editions which were circulated in more than 50 countries. I began receiving letters and even phone calls literally from around the world . . . more than 30 million read that book" (*The 1980's: Countdown to Armageddon* (Toronto, New York, 1981), pp. 4, 11).
6. Cornelis Vanderwaal, *Hal Lindsey and Biblical Prophecy* (St. Catherines, Canada, 1978), p. 8.
7. Hal Lindsey, *A Study Manual to the Late Great Planet Earth* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1971), p. 13. Of all the signs of the End given by Christ in His Olivet Discourse, Lindsey claims that "the most important sign in Matthew has to be the restoration of the Jews to the land in the rebirth of Israel" (*Planet*, p. 53).
8. *Planet*, p. 53; emphasis supplied.
9. *Planet*, p. 53.
10. *Planet*, p. 54.
11. *Planet*, p. 54.
12. W. Ward Gasque, "Future Fact? Future Fiction?" *Christianity Today*, 21 (April 15, 1977): 40.
13. *Planet*, p. 54.
14. *Planet*, p. 54.
15. Lindsey emphasizes this conviction by saying, for example, that the last "seven-year period couldn't begin until the Jewish people reestablished their nation in their ancient homeland of Palestine" (*Planet*, p. 42).
16. David Webber and N. W. Hutchings, *Is this the Last Century?* (Nashville, 1979), p. 48.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 50.
18. Gary Wilburn, "The Doomsday Chic," *Christianity Today*, 22 (January 27, 1978): 22.
19. Hal Lindsey, *The 1980's: Countdown to Armageddon* (Toronto, New York, 1980), p. 1.

Chapter 3

LINDSEY'S PROPHETIC JIGSAW PUZZLE

The jigsaw puzzle of End-time events which Lindsey has so imaginatively constructed, includes the following key pieces: the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, the repossession of ancient Jerusalem in 1967, the Secret Rapture of the Church in 1981, the seven-year countdown Tribulation events, the visible Return of Christ by 1988. In 1970 Lindsey predicted that since the first two key pieces of the jigsaw had already been placed, the stage was set for “the many adjacent pieces (to) rapidly fall into place.”¹

This chapter aims primarily at familiarizing the reader with the key “adjacent pieces” of the jigsaw puzzle which Lindsey predicted would rapidly fall into place during the decade of the 1980s. It will be shown in this and the following chapter that at least five of Lindsey’s key predictions have failed to come to pass.

I. THE RAPTURE

The Secret Rapture of the church is the next key piece of Lindsey’s prophetic jigsaw which should have fallen into place by 1981. Consequently, as we shall soon see, this event is also the first noteworthy prediction which has failed to come to pass. Before discussing the time element of the Secret Rapture, it may be helpful to briefly define this dispensational belief for the sake of those readers unfamiliar with it.

The Secret Snatch. The Rapture, according to Lindsey and dispensationalists in general, is Christ’s secret and invisible coming partway to the earth to resurrect the sleeping saints and to transform living believers. Both groups will then be suddenly, secretly, and invisibly snatched away from the earth to meet the descending Lord in the air, and then they will go to heaven with Christ to celebrate the marriage feast of the Lamb for seven years.² At the end of the seven-year period, Christ will return again, this time visibly, gloriously and all the way to the earth, to destroy His enemies at the Battle of Armageddon and to set up His terrestrial millennial reign.

Dispensationalists derive the seven-year period from the seventieth week of Daniel 9:27 and from adding together the “forty-two months” and the “1260 days” mentioned in Revelation 11:2, 3.³ The latter addition is totally arbitrary, since the two periods of time mentioned in Revelation 11:2,3 are not consecutive but parallel. The first refers to the period of persecution by a hostile power and the second to the Christian witness during such a time of persecution.

Imminent Rapture. The Secret Rapture, which Lindsey prefers to call “the Great Snatch”⁴ because it involves the sudden snatching away of millions of people, is viewed by dispensationalists as imminent, because its two main preconditions, namely, the reestablishment of the State of Israel and the repossession of ancient Jerusalem, have already taken place.⁵

The sense of imminence of the Rapture is expressed even on bumper stickers such as the one that warns: “IF THE DRIVER DISAPPEARS GRAB THE WHEEL.” Lindsey has attempted to capture the drama caused by this sudden disappearance in a series of imaginative descriptions such as this: “There I was, driving down the freeway and all of a sudden the place went crazy . . . cars going in all directions . . . and not one of them had a driver. I mean it was wild! I think we’ve got an invasion from outer space!”⁶

Noisiest Passage. The main reasons for rejecting this belief in a secret, invisible Rapture of the church are discussed at length in my book, *The Advent Hope for Human Hopelessness*.⁷ In this context it suffices to note that the most notorious description of the Rapture of the Church, which is found in 1 Thessalonians 4:25-17, suggests the very opposite of a secret, invisible Coming of Christ.

The text speaks of the Lord descending “from heaven with a *cry* of command, with the archangel’s *call*, and with the *sound of the trumpet* of God” (v. 16).⁸ The “cry,” “call,” “trumpet” and the great gathering of living and resurrected saints hardly suggest a secret, invisible and instantaneous event. On the contrary, this is perhaps the noisiest passage in the Bible, a fact which discredits the notion of a secret Rapture.

Lindsey’s Date of the Rapture. Lindsey has the merit not only of having dramatically portrayed the “Great Snatch,” but also of having predicted with considerable clarity its approximate time. In 1970 he explicitly predicted that Christ’s visible Return would occur “within forty years or so of 1948,” that is, by 1988.⁹ Since the secret Rapture of the Church, according to Lindsey and most dispensationalists, must take place seven years before Christ’s visible Return, then it should already have taken place by 1981.

In an article entitled “The Eschatology of Hal Lindsey,” published in 1975 in *Review and Expositor*, Dale Moody wrote: “If the ‘Great Snatch,’ as Lindsey repeatedly calls the Rapture, does take place before the Tribulation and by 1981, I will beg forgiveness from Lindsey for doubting his infallibility as we meet in the air.”¹⁰

Dale Moody needs not worry about begging forgiveness from Lindsey, because as everybody knows, the “Great Snatch” did not take place by 1981. Instead, *it is Hal Lindsey who should beg forgiveness* from the millions of people he has misled by this noteworthy mistaken prediction.

First Mistaken Prediction. One wonders, how many of the millions who have read Lindsey’s books do realize that time has already proved him wrong in his approximate calculation of the time of the Rapture? This first mistaken prediction should be a matter of grave concern to those who believe that the Rapture marks the beginning of “the seven-year countdown” to Armageddon, during which the major final events are to occur.

If Lindsey was wrong in predicting the time of the Rapture, there is reason to believe that he may be equally mistaken in his predictions of the various Tribulation events to occur during the decade of the 1980’s, especially since the latter are dictated by the former. In fact, we shall soon see that time has already proved Lindsey mistaken on at least four of his seven-year countdown predictions. The 1980s are truly proving to be not the countdown to Armageddon, but rather the countdown to the fallacy of Lindsey’s prophetic vagaries.

II. TRIBULATION EVENTS

The Secret Rapture, which according to Lindsey’s prophetic jigsaw puzzle should already have occurred by 1981, sets the stage for the “seven-year countdown” (Dan 9:27; Rev 12:2-3) to Armageddon and to Christ’s visible Return.

David Webber and Noah Hutchings, two dispensational writers who greatly support Lindsey’s prophetic calendar in their book, *Is This the Last Century?* (1979), explicitly suggest the possibility “that the Tribulation period will begin in 1981, that Christ will return in 1988” and that the “seven years from 1981 to 1988 will be the Tribulation period.”¹¹ These last seven years of human history are viewed by dispensationalists as the most crucial, because the most incredible events of human history are supposed to take place at this time.

I shall attempt to summarize briefly below the major events of this “seven-year countdown” as far as I have been able to reconstruct them from Lindsey’s books.

The Rise of a Roman Antichrist

A Roman Dictator, known as the Roman Antichrist, or, as Lindsey prefers to call him, “The Future Fuehrer,”¹² is to rise to power immediately after the Rapture, out of the ten-nation confederacy of the European Common Market (Dan 7:23-24; Rev 13). He will sign a protection treaty with the State of Israel which will enable the Israelis to rebuild the Jerusalem Temple in three and one-half years and to reinstitute its sacrificial services (Dan 9:27; Matt 24:15-16).¹³

This new Temple and its sacrificial services will hardly be inaugurated when the Roman Antichrist will break the covenant with the Jews and will go to the Temple, claiming to be God, disrupting the sacrificial services, and thus accomplishing the abomination of desolation predicted by Daniel (Dan 7:27; cf. Matt 24:15-16).¹⁴ This event marks the beginning of the last three and one-half years of the Antichrist’s cruel reign, which, Lindsey writes, “will make the regimes of Hitler, Mao, and Stalin look like Girl Scouts wearing a daisy chain by comparison.”¹⁵

Invasion of Israel

Immediately after the profanation of the Temple by the Roman Antichrist, an Arab-African confederacy headed by Egypt (the King of the South of Daniel 11:40a) will launch an invasion of Israel.¹⁶ Russia and her allies (the King of the North of Daniel 11:40b and Ezekiel 38) will counterattack by sweeping over Arab countries as well as the State of Israel through an amphibious and land invasion of the Middle East.

The Russian invasion of the Middle East will be of short duration, because Ezekiel (38:18-22; 39:3-5) supposedly predicts that the Roman Antichrist will mobilize a vast army consisting of soldiers from the Roman Confederacy (Common Market countries) and from Red China, which will utterly destroy the Russian army in Israel.¹⁷

The Battle of Armageddon

The complete annihilation of both the Arab-African armies and the Russian forces will leave only two great powers to fight for world dominion: “the combined forces of the Western civilization under the leadership of the Roman Dictator and the vast hordes of the Orient probably united under the Red Chinese war machine.”¹⁸

The two armies of the two remaining world powers will fight against each other in a final, decisive battle for world control, in the place called "Armageddon," which is located in the plain of Jezreel in lower Galilee between the Mediterranean and the Jordan (Rev 16:13, 14, 16). At the climactic moment of the Battle of Armageddon, Christ will return with the Church to destroy all the ungodly and to set up the millennial kingdom of God, which He will rule out of Jerusalem.

An examination of each piece of Lindsey's prophetic puzzle in the light of the Scriptures and of recent developments would take us beyond the limited scope of this booklet. The reader is referred to my larger study *The Advent Hope for Human Hopelessness* for an extensive analysis of the dispensational principles of prophetic interpretation.

The next two chapters will focus primarily on four specific predictions which, like the one of the Rapture already considered, have failed to come to pass. It is my fervent hope that this exposé of a sampling of five specific mistaken predictions made by Lindsey will help many honest Bible students to see the danger of using Biblical prophecies for date-setting sensationalism.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 3

1. *Planet*, p. 58.

2. A comprehensive exposition of the traditional dispensational view of the Rapture is provided by J. F. Walvoord, *The Rapture Question* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1957).

3. For example, Lindsey writes: "The apostle John counted out seven years for this period when he spoke of the second half being forty-two months (i.e., 3 1/2 years), and the first half being 1260 days (i.e., 3 1/2 x 360 days, which is the Biblical year) (Revelation 11:2, 3)" (*Planet*, p. 44).

4. Hal Lindsey, *The Rapture: Truth or Consequences* (Toronto, New York, 1983), p. 24.

5. Lindsey expresses this conviction when he writes: "With the Jewish nation reborn in the land of Palestine, ancient Jerusalem once again under total Jewish control for the first time in 2600 years, and talk of rebuilding the great Temple, the most important prophetic sign of Jesus Christ's soon coming is before us" (*Planet*, p. 57).

6. *Planet*, p. 136.

7. See chapter 11, entitled "Mistaken Signs of the Advent Hope." For a most comprehensive and scholarly debate on the issues related to the

Rapture, see the symposium, *The Rapture: Pre-, Mid-, or Post-Tribulational?* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1984), consisting of challenges and responses prepared by four professors from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School: Richard R. Reiter, Paul D. Feinberg, Gleason L. Archer, Douglas J. Moo.

8. Emphasis supplied. Since 1950 more and more evangelical scholars have been abandoning the notion of a secret Rapture of the Church before the seven-year tribulation and embracing historic post-tribulationism. The latter holds that the Church will go through the great tribulation, at the end of which Christ will return visibly and gloriously to resurrect the sleeping saints and to save the living believers. Much of the credit for the resurgence of post-tribulationism goes to George E. Ladd, New Testament Professor at Fuller Theological Seminary. His respected scholarship, coupled with his commitment to evangelicalism, has caused many to abandon their view of a pre-tribulation secret Rapture. Some of Ladd's important books on this subject are: *Crucial Questions About the Kingdom of God* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1952); *The Blessed Hope* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1956); *The Last Things* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1978).

9. *Planet*, p. 54.

10. Dale Moody, "The Eschatology of Hal Lindsey," *Review and Expositor*, 72 (Summer, 1975): 278.

11. David Webber and Noah Hutchings, *Is This the Last Century?* (Nashville, 1979), pp. 49, 50. Similarly, Lindsey writes, "This seven-year period we have called the 'countdown' is a period of unique events. There is more prophecy concerning this period than any other era the Bible describes" (*Planet*, p. 44).

12. "The Future Fuehrer" is the very title of the chapter devoted to the Roman Antichrist (*Planet*, pp. 98-113).

13. *Planet*, pp. 56, 110, 151, 152.

14. *Planet*, pp. 56, 152, 153.

15. *Planet*, p. 110

16. *Planet*, pp. 77, 153.

17. Lindsey even supplies two charts to illustrate the Russian invasion of the Middle East and the attack against the Russian army by the Roman Confederacy (*Planet*, pp. 155, 159).

18. *Planet*, p. 162.

Chapter 4

LINDSEY'S PERPLEXING PUZZLE

Lindsey's jigsaw puzzle of the seven-year countdown events, briefly described in the previous chapter, raises at least two major perplexing questions to be addressed in this chapter: (1) How can Lindsey, and a host of dispensationalists with him, construct from Biblical prophecies such an imaginative scenario of events to take place within the short span of the last seven years of human history? (2) Since, as we have seen, Lindsey emphatically predicts, even by the title of one of his books, that the decade of 1980s is the countdown to Armageddon, are the key pieces of his prophetic jigsaw puzzle falling into place in this decade according to his prophetic timetable?

I. TWO MISTAKEN PRINCIPLES OF PROPHETIC INTERPRETATION

The answer to the first question is to be found in the dispensational interpretation of Biblical prophecies which is based on two determinative principles, known as (1) "consistent literalism" and (2) a permanent distinction between Israel and the Church.

Consistent Literalism. On the basis of the principle of consistent literalism, Old Testament prophecies regarding the restoration of Israel, the rebuilding of the temple, and the reinstatement of animal sacrifices must be fulfilled in a literal way to the Jewish nation in Palestine during the "terminal generation" which began in 1948, and especially during the last seven-year countdown.

It is impossible within the limited scope of this booklet to examine the two determinative principles of dispensational prophetic interpretation. The reader is referred to my extensive analysis of these principles in my book *The Advent Hope for Human Hopelessness*.

My study shows that the principle of consistent literalism fails adequately to interpret Biblical prophecy because it ignores the progressive nature of God's revelation; it disregards the Messianic and expanding fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies; and it contradicts itself through its inconsistent interpretation of Biblical prophecies.

Israel and the Church. On the basis of the second principle of a permanent distinction between Israel and the Church, many Old Testament prophecies regarding the Jews must be fulfilled at the end of time in and through a literal Israel, because what the Scripture says about Israel cannot be applied to the Church and vice versa.

Regarding the second principle, it must be said that though the New Testament sometimes does speak of Jews in distinction from Gentiles, it never teaches or implies that God has in mind a separate future for Israel in distinction to that planned for the Church.

In the New Testament the church lives, not as a new olive tree, but as new olive branches grafted into the one olive tree of the Israel of God (Rom 11:17-24). The future of Israel is seen in the New Testament, not in terms of a millennial political kingdom in Palestine, but in terms of everlasting blessedness shared together with the redeemed of all ages in a restored new earth.¹

II. FOUR PREDICTIONS THAT FAILED

1. The Rise of the Roman Antichrist

The second question of whether or not the tribulation events of the seven-year-countdown are being fulfilled in the decade of the 1980s is simple to answer: no sign of their fulfillment is yet in sight, even though we are already beyond the midpoint of the 1980s.

We already noted that Lindsey's prediction of the secret Rapture of the church failed to come to pass by 1981. This first mistaken prediction by Lindsey is closely related to the four other mistaken predictions to be considered below.

The second of Lindsey's mistaken predictions regards the meteoric rise of a Roman Antichrist out of the ten nations of the European Common Market. This political dictator and religious imposter was to rise to power immediately after the Rapture of the church by 1981. In 1970 Lindsey wrote that believing Christians are "the restrainer" of 2 Thessalonians 2:6-12, who

are holding “back the rise of this World Dictator.”²² The Rapture of believers by 1981 was to remove the “restrainer” which was in turn to enable the Roman Antichrist to exert “power and might . . . over the entire world.”²³

A Possible Candidate. In 1970 Lindsey saw a possible candidate for the role of Roman Antichrist in the Frenchman Jean-Jacques Servan-Schreiber, “newspaper editor and author of *The American Challenge*.”²⁴ The reason for this choice was that Servan-Schreiber at that time was “furiously trying to push a U.S. of Europe” and because he wanted “to become its first president.”²⁵

This sensational prediction of Lindsey has miserably failed, like the previous one about the Rapture. Not only has no political-religious dictator appeared in Western Europe during the early part of the 1980s, but also the chances of his imminent rise are extremely remote. The reasons are of different natures and could be summarized in the following four points.

Fragile Economic Community. First, the European Common Market is not a strong political federation of nations comparable to the federation of the fifty American states. On the contrary, it is a very fragile economic community of nations whose governing body does not dictate the internal political affairs of the ten nations it represents. Thus, it is inconceivable that a political-religious dictator could ever arise out of the governing body of such a fragile economic community that is presently fighting for its very survival.

Political Fragmentation. Second, it is unimaginable for anyone familiar with the political fragmentation existing in most of the ten nations belonging to the European Common Market that a political dictator could ever succeed today in dominating all these ten nations without a bloody resistance. In my own country of Italy, for example, where we have more than a dozen political parties and where coalition governments have fallen dozens of times since 1945, it is inconceivable that all political parties would suddenly support a European political-religious dictator.

If nations such as England, France, Belgium, Holland, and Poland fought heroically against Hitler’s attempt to dominate them, there is every reason to believe that they are prepared to fight again even more heroically today against anyone making a similar attempt to control them. This is especially true in view of the struggle Europeans have waged during the last forty years for greater political and civil liberties.

American Intervention. Third, it is difficult to perceive how a Roman Dictator could succeed in dominating ten European nations without being challenged by the U.S., Russia or both. Lindsey discounts the

possibility of an American intervention against the Roman Antichrist because he predicted in 1970 that “according to the prophetic outlook, the United States will cease being the leader of the West and will probably become in some way a part of the new European sphere of power . . . It is certain that the leadership of the West must shift to Rome, in its revived form, and if the U.S. is still around at the time, it will not be the power it now is.”⁶

On the basis of Ezekiel’s statement, “I will send fire—upon those who dwell securely in the coastland . . .” (Ezek 39:6; Amplified), Lindsey wrote in 1970, “It is clear that the U.S. cannot be the leader of the West in the future.”⁷

The developments of the last fifteen years have clearly proved Lindsey totally wrong in this important prediction. Not only has the U.S. retained and strengthened its position of leadership of the West, but there are also no indications that the leadership of the West has begun to shift toward a revived Rome. This clearly means that another key piece of Lindsey’s prophetic jigsaw puzzle has failed to fall into place.

European Secularism. Fourth, it is hard to imagine how today’s Europeans, who are predominantly secularistic and humanistic in their outlook (less than 10% are churchgoers), could suddenly become worshipers of a Roman Dictator who claims to be a divine being. This was conceivable in ancient Rome when the emperor was often worshipped as god but hardly today when even papal directives are largely ignored by the majority of European Catholics. In Italy, for example, in spite of papal threats against those who would vote in favor of divorce and abortion, Catholics in two recent referenda did vote overwhelmingly in favor of both practices, thus openly defying papal injunctions.

The obvious conclusion that emerges from the above considerations is that not only has Lindsey’s Roman Antichrist failed to appear as predicted in the early 1980s, but also that the possibility of his imminent arising out of the present political and religious climate of Western Europe is extremely remote. This means that a second vital piece of Lindsey’s prophetic jigsaw has failed to fall into place.

2. The Rebuilding of the Tribulation Temple

Closely related to the Rapture and the rise of the Roman Antichrist, there is a third mistaken prediction which Lindsey made regarding the rebuilding of the tribulation Temple. The Roman Antichrist, predicted to appear in the early 1980s, was supposed to make the rebuilding of the Temple possible by making “‘a strong covenant’ (Dan 9:27) with the Israelis, guaranteeing their safety and protection.”⁸

The Time of the Rebuilding. According to most dispensationalists, the Jerusalem Temple must be rebuilt by the middle of the last prophetic week of Daniel 9:27. Thomas S. McCalls, a leading dispensationalist, emphatically states: “As far as the time is concerned, it has been dogmatically stated that the temple must be rebuilt by the middle of the tribulation. This is all that is revealed.”⁹

In Lindsey’s prophetic timetable the rebuilding of the Jerusalem Temple was to be completed by the middle of the 1980s, that is, at mid-point of the seven-year-countdown which terminates by 1988. The treaty of protection, which the Roman Antichrist was to make with Israelites immediately after the Rapture, was to enable the Israelites to rebuild their Temple in three and one-half years and to reinstitute the sacrificial services (Dan 9:26-27; Matt 24:15-16; Rev 11:1-2). In 1970 Lindsey wrote that with the “talk of rebuilding the great Temple, the most important prophetic sign of Jesus Christ’s soon coming is before us.”¹⁰

Rumors of the Rebuilding. One wonders, What has happened to this “*most important prophetic sign*” of Christ’s imminent return during the last fifteen years? Has the rebuilding of the great Temple already begun in any form? To my knowledge, the only fabrication begun is not that of the Temple but of stories about it. *Christianity Today* wrote in December 1967 that “A few years ago reports were widely circulated that a prefabricated temple for Jerusalem was seen at a port somewhere in Florida.”¹¹

An article appeared in August 1967 in the British magazine, *The Christian and Christianity Today*, reporting news “received from authoritative sources in Sellersburg, Indiana” that “five hundred rail carloads of stone from Bedford (Indiana), considered to be among the finest building stone in the world, are being freighted pre-cut to exact specifications, and one consignment has already been dispatched to Israel. Shipments are being handled by Pier 26 in New York.”¹²

The entire story has been flatly denied, both by the Israeli government and by industry sources in Indiana. Such a fanciful fabrication reflects the unusual interest of some dispensationalists in helping God to fulfill what they believe to be a crucial End-time prophecy.

The belief of an End-time rebuilding of the Jerusalem Temple is based primarily on two texts (Dan 9:26-27 and Matt 24:14-15) which, as I have shown elsewhere, offer no support whatsoever to such a notion.¹³ Besides being devoid of any prophetic support, this belief is discredited also by crucial theological and practical considerations.

Theological Objections. Theologically, the notion of a literal rebuilding of the Jerusalem Temple during the tribulation is contradicted by the New Testament teaching regarding the fulfillment and termination of the Temple's services at and through the sacrifice of Christ on the Cross (Matt 27:51; Heb 9:11-14; 8:13).

The only new temple of which the New Testament speaks is the one being built, not during a future seven-year tribulation upon Mount Zion, but in the present "upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord" (Eph 2:20; RSV).

Practical Objections. Practically, the possibility of rebuilding the Jerusalem Temple on its ancient site is negated by several obstacles. The most serious of these is the presence of the Moslem Dome of the Rock and the nearby Al Aksa Mosque, which appear to be located on the very ancient Temple site. Since for Judaism the only permissible location for the Temple is its ancient site (Deut 12:10-14), the Dome of the Rock would need to be removed before any rebuilding could begin. Such an action would precipitate an Arab holy war against Israel, besides violating the Israelis' commitment to respect all the sacred sites of all religions.

Another practical objection is the prevailing belief among Orthodox Jews that only the Messiah can rebuild the Temple. Since for the Jews the Messiah has not yet come, they are not at liberty to rebuild the Temple.¹⁴ Moreover, before the Jews could consider rebuilding the Temple, they would need to accept the notion of reviving sacrifices—a notion which most Jews find repulsive and abhorrent. Modern Judaism views the sacrificial system as an ancient and outmoded form of religious expression which has been replaced by repentance, prayer, good deeds, Torah-study, charity and justice.¹⁵

The above considerations suffice to show that Lindsey's prediction of the rebuilding of the Temple is a third key piece of his prophetic jigsaw which has failed to fall into place by the early part of the 1980s. Not only has the ancient Temple not been rebuilt, but also it seems very unlikely that its rebuilding could take place in the near future on account of the crucial theological and practical objections mentioned above.

3. Egypt: The King of the South

A fourth mistaken piece of Lindsey's prophetic jigsaw puzzle, which is supposed to fit right next to that of the rebuilding of the Temple, is the invasion of Israel by an Arab-African confederacy. Initially this

confederacy is to be supported by Russia and headed by Egypt, the prophetic King of the South, spoken of in Daniel 11:40. In 1970 Lindsey calculated that this invasion would occur sometime in the middle of the 1980s, that is, immediately after the inauguration of the Jerusalem Temple and its profanation by the Roman Antichrist.¹⁶

Lindsey predicted that Egypt, “the king of the South” of Daniel 11:40a, would succeed in uniting “Arabs and the black Africans into a ‘third world force.’”¹⁷ Russia would facilitate this development by arming and equipping many Arab and African nations. At the head of this Pan Arab-African confederacy, Egypt was to launch an invasion of Israel. This was to prove to be a fatal mistake because the Russians, “the king of the North” of Daniel 11:40b, “will double-cross the Arabs, Egyptians, and Africans, and for a short while conquer the Middle East.”¹⁸

The Basis of Lindsey’s Prediction. This prediction was obviously inspired by the leadership role which Egypt enjoyed under Nasser, in whom Lindsey saw “the King of the South” of Daniel 11:40.¹⁹ Furthermore, by interpreting “Put” and “Cush” mentioned in Daniel 11:43, as representing “the black Africans and African Arabs, respectively,” he predicted that “‘black African’ and ‘Arab-African’ countries will be involved with Egypt” first in invading Israel and later in suffering defeat at the hands of the Russians.²⁰

The fact that Nasser was already in poor health in 1970 did not deter Lindsey from predicting that Egypt would become the leader of a “Third World Force.” On the contrary, he explicitly wrote: “Whether he (Nasser) continues to lead Egypt, or is replaced by some other leader or is dead by the time this is published, the clearly predictable course of the Middle East will not be changed . . . Current events in the Middle East have prepared the stage for Egypt’s last act in the great drama which will climax with the finale, Christ’s personal return to earth.”²¹

What Went Wrong? Since fifteen years have already passed from the time Lindsey made this bold prediction, it is legitimate to ask, has Egypt become during this time the leader of a “third world force” consisting of Arab and African nations? Moreover, has Egypt ever attempted during the past fifteen years to organize a Pan-Arab and African army to launch an invasion of Israel? The answer to these questions is evident. This mistaken prediction represents a fourth key piece of Lindsey’s prophetic jigsaw which has failed to fall into place.

One wonders, How could Lindsey make so many grossly mistaken predictions? The answer is quite simple. His predictions were shaped more

by current trends than by the Scripture. The political leadership of Egypt in 1970 was read back by Lindsey into Biblical prophecies. This arbitrary method of interpreting prophecy can only lead to disappointments besides undermining the value and permanent relevance of prophetic messages.

A New King of the South? In 1970, when Egypt enjoyed the position of leadership among Arab nations, it was feasible for Lindsey to predict that Egypt would eventually succeed in uniting Arab and African nations against their common enemy, Israel. History, however, sometimes takes unexpected turns. This has been particularly true in the case of Egypt. Very few mortals could have foreseen in 1970 that within ten years Egypt would lose the support of many Arab and African nations by ending thirty years of war with Israel through the signing of an official peace treaty on March 26, 1979, and the establishing of diplomatic relations with Israel.

In the light of recent developments, it is obvious that today Egypt can no longer play the role of “the king of the South” who is to lead an Arab-African confederacy against Israel. This is particularly true in view of the prevailing tension among Arab nations and the outright war between Iran and Iraq. Before the Arab nations can unite against Israel, they must stop fighting among themselves.

It is evident, then, that another key piece of Hal Lindsey’s prophetic jigsaw (the fourth in our count), has failed to fall into place. What this means is that if Lindsey were to rewrite *The Late Great Planet Earth* today, he would obviously look elsewhere for the prophetic king of the South—possibly to Libya, in view of the latter’s hatred for Israel and diplomatic ties with Moscow. This kind of arbitrary interpretation of prophecies can only aid the cause of those critics who are only too glad to capitalize on such vagaries to caricature and ridicule the whole belief in a personal Return of Christ to this earth.

4. Russia: The King of the North

A fifth mistaken piece of Lindsey’s prophetic jigsaw puzzle can be seen in his prediction made in 1970, that Russia, the King of the North of Daniel 11:40b and Ezekiel 38, would soon “arm and equip a vast confederacy” of African and Arab nations, which would join together in a common invasion of Israel.²² Lindsey explicitly predicted in 1970 that in “the next few years” Northern Africa would become “solidly pro-Soviet” and that “many of the African nations will be united and allied with the Russians in the invasion of Israel. This is in accord with Daniel’s graphic description of this invasion (Daniel 11:36-45).”²³

The Invasion of Israel. Lindsey warned his readers in 1970 especially to “watch the actions of Iran in relation to Russia and the United Arab Republic.”²⁴ On the basis of Ezekiel 38:5-6 he predicted that Iran would soon “join the United Arab Republic in its hostility against Israel” and that the Russians would “gain footholds in Iran . . . in order to mount the large-scale invasion (of Israel) predicted by Ezekiel.”²⁵

The invasion of Israel, according to Lindsey’s prophetic calculations, was to take place at mid-point of the seven-year countdown (Dan 9:24), “almost immediately after the (Roman) Antichrist declares himself to be God” and profanes the newly inaugurated Jerusalem Temple (2 Thess 2:4; Matt 24:15).²⁶ Since the seven-year countdown, for Lindsey, terminates by the end of the decade of the 1980s, the invasion of Israel should already have taken place by 1985.

This invasion, as Lindsey graphically portrays by a chart, was to have taken place in two phases. First, the pro-Soviet “Arab-African confederacy headed by Egypt (King of the South) launches an invasion of Israel.”²⁷ Then, as Daniel 11:42, 43 indicates, wrote Lindsey in 1970, “the Russian bloc will double-cross the Arabs, Egyptians, and Africans, and for a short time conquer the Middle East.”²⁸

Another Prediction That Failed. The developments of the last fifteen years could not have proved more forcefully the fallacies of Lindsey’s predictions. What has happened in most cases is the very opposite of what Lindsey predicted would happen. Africa has become not “solidly pro-Soviet,” but less pro-Soviet, as several of its countries have moved away from Soviet influence and turned instead to the West for economic and military assistance. No Arab-African confederacy has ever come into existence. No alliance has ever developed between Iran and Egypt; on the contrary, the relations between the two countries have worsened during the last few years.

Russia has lost rather than gained footholds in Iran. No Arab-African invasion of Israel ever took place by 1985. On the contrary, Arab nations, such as Egypt and Jordan, are for the first time in our generation talking peace with Israel. This development is devastating to Lindsey’s countdown which requires war. No Russian “amphibious and land invasion of Israel”²⁹ has happened in the first half of the 1980s nor is it likely to happen in the latter half. It is evident that another key piece of Lindsey’s prophetic jigsaw (the fifth in our count) has failed to fall into place.

Russia in Prophecy? How could Lindsey make so many grossly mistaken predictions in 1970? The answer is simple. His predictions were

shaped more by the events of 1970s than by the Scriptures. He used the latter to support the former. With great imagination, Lindsey read into Biblical prophecies his expected Russian invasion of Israel. Such a method of Biblical interpretation only serves to expose the message of the prophets to the ridicule of the critics.

A good example of Lindsey's irresponsible interpretation of Biblical prophecy is the way Lindsey fits Russia into his End-time prophetic jigsaw—by interpreting Ezekiel's references to Gog, Magog, Rosh ("Russia"), Meshech ("Moscow"), and Tubal (Ezek 38:2-3)—as explicit predictions about modern Russia and its invasion of Israel. He never stops to consider questions such as these: How could Ezekiel be writing to his contemporary readers about modern Russia when such a nation did not exist at his time? How could Ezekiel mean "*the city of Moscow*"³⁰ by "Meshech" when Moscow was not established until the 12th century A.D.?

Furthermore, how can Ezekiel's references to the "uttermost north" apply to "only one nation," namely, "the U.S.S.R."?³¹ when, as T. Boersma points out, "with respect to Palestine, the area southeast of the Black Sea is certainly 'the uttermost north' "³² What meaning would Ezekiel's message have for his immediate readers, if he wrote about geographical places and people who came into existence 2600 years later?

Lindsey's Problem. A major cause of Lindsey's problem is his failure to recognize that geographical locations mentioned by Ezekiel cannot be identified with names found on a contemporary world map, but rather must be sought on a map of the ancient Near East. Any good map of the ancient Near East locates most of the places mentioned by Ezekiel, not in Russia, but in what today is Turkey.³³

Moreover, the New Testament applies Gog and Magog, not to modern Russia, but to the hordes of the wicked at the close of the millennium (Rev 20:7-8). Ezekiel's battle of God and Magog against God's people (Ezek 38 and 39) takes place in the New Testament, not before Christ's Return, but at the close of the millennium when "the nations which are at the four corners of the earth, that is, Gog and Magog" will gather for battle against "the camp of the saints and the beloved city" (Rev 20:8-9). Why does Lindsey ignore such an explicit New Testament interpretation of Ezekiel's prophecy?

Lindsey turns Biblical prophecies into a jigsaw puzzle whose pieces can be identified only by those who accept his clue. This method reduces the Bible into a secret teaching which only a few clever initiates can

understand. "In the final analysis," as Cornelis Vanderwaall keenly observes, "Lindsey's reading of Scripture is a new form of Christian Gnosticism."³⁴

The method used by Lindsey to raise people's expectations with his predictions supposed to be "more up-to-date than tomorrow's newspaper,"³⁵ but which are just as quickly outdated, only leads to disappointment and disillusionment. If this irresponsible method of using the Scripture is not vigorously challenged, there will be an ever-increasing number of puzzled Christians who ultimately will doubt, if not totally abandon, their Advent Hope.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 4

1. For a most perceptive and comprehensive analysis of the dispensational principles of prophetic interpretation, see Hans K. LaRondelle, *The Israel of God in Prophecy: Principles of Prophetic Interpretation* (Berrien Springs: Michigan, Andrews University Press, 1983).

2. *Planet*, pp. 110; cf. pp. 151, 152.

3. *Planet*, p. 110.

4. *Planet*, p. 95.

5. *Planet*, p. 95.

6. *Planet*, pp. 95-96. Commenting on the statement he wrote in 1970 in *The Late Great Planet Earth* that "as the United States loses power, western Europe will be forced to unite and become the standard-bearer," Lindsey writes in 1980 with a sense of pride: "I knew this would happen" (*The 1980's: Countdown to Armageddon*, p. 107). It is surprising that Lindsey would even congratulate himself, since Europe hardly became politically united or militarily stronger than the U.S.A. during the decade of the 1970s.

7. *Planet*, p. 161.

8. *Planet*, p. 152.

9. Thomas S. McCall, "Problems in Rebuilding the Tribulation Temple," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 129 (January, 1972): 79.

10. *Planet*, p. 57.

11. Editorial, "Israel: Things to Come," *Christianity Today*, 12 (December 22, 1967): 35.

12. *The Christian and Christianity Today* (August 4, 1967): 7-8.

13. See chapter 11 of *The Advent Hope for Human Hopelessness*.

14. See A. Cohen, *Everyman's Talmud* (New York, 1949), pp. 354-355; Moses Bottenweiser, "Messiah," *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, VIII (1904): 511.

15. Emil G. Hirsch explains: "Reform Judaism omits from the prayer-book reference to the sacrifices, sanguinary ceremonies being repugnant to its religious consciousness" ("Sacrifices," *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, X [1905]: 628).

16. Lindsey explicitly places the invasion of Israel by "the Arab-African confederacy headed by Egypt (King of the South) . . . almost immediately after the Antichrist declares himself to be God . . . and in the Temple proclaims himself to be God incarnate (2 Thessalonians 2:4; Matt 24:15)" (*Planet*, p. 153).

17. *Planet*, p. 79.

18. *Planet*, p. 158.

19. Lindsey's conviction was based on the fact that "Nasser believes that he can unite the Arabs to lead the resurrection of all underprivileged nations into a mighty third world force. He envisions himself as the one to lead the nations of Africa, black and Arab, to unity" (*Planet*, p. 75).

20. *Planet*, p. 10.

21. *Planet*, pp. 76-77.

22. *Planet*, p. 71.

23. *Planet*, pp. 68-69. Referring to Northern Africa, Lindsey wrote in 1970: "As we watch this area in the next few years we shall see indications that it is destined to join the southern sphere of power which will attack Israel along with the 'King of the North'" (*Planet*, p. 69).

24. *Planet*, p. 68.

25. *Planet*, p. 67.

26. *Planet*, p. 153.

27. See chart one, *Planet*, p. 155.

28. *Planet*, p. 158. See chart two, *Planet*, p. 159.

29. *Planet*, p. 157.

30. *Planet*, p. 65.

31. *Planet*, p. 66.

32. T. Boersma, *Is the Bible a Jigsaw Puzzle . . . An Evaluation of Hal Lindsey's Writing* (St. Catherines, Canada, 1978), p. 116.

33. For a concise and informative discussion of the geographic names mentioned in Ezekiel 38-39, see T. Boersma (n. 32), pp. 113-125.

34. Cornelis Vanderwaall, *Hal Lindsey and Biblical Prophecy* (St. Catherines, Canada, 1978), p. 55.

35. Hal Lindsey, *There Is a New World Coming* (London, 1974), p. 7.

Chapter 5

LINDSEY

A HERO OR

A BUM?

One wonders, How is Lindsey feeling today after seeing that at least five of his key predictions have failed to come to pass by the middle of the 1980s? In an interview reported in *Christianity Today* in April 1977, Ward Gasque asked Lindsey, “But what if you’re wrong?” Lindsey replied: “Well, there’s just a split second’s difference between a hero and a bum. I didn’t ask to be a hero, but I guess I have become one in the Christian community. So I accept it. But if I’m wrong about this, I guess I’ll become a bum.”¹

By shrugging his shoulders and saying, “Sorry, I was a bum!” Lindsey hardly reflects a genuine pastoral concern for the millions whom he has misled by his books. Such a lighthearted admission will not help them pick up the pieces of their disillusionment and come to a true understanding of Biblical prophecy. More important still, there are no indications that Lindsey is prepared to face the fact that he has “become a bum.”

Personally, I have not found a single statement in Lindsey’s recent books expressing regret for having misled millions of readers through his mistaken predictions. On the contrary, there are indications that Lindsey has chosen to minimize his mistakes by disengaging himself from his earlier predictions and to maximize his popularity by emphasizing personal salvation and preparation for the Rapture.²

Recalculating the Second Advent. In an address delivered in Toronto in 1979, Lindsey explained that the budding fig tree includes not only the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, but also the repossession of Old Jerusalem in 1967.³ This new inclusion enables Lindsey to gain another nineteen years. This represents a clear shift away from his fixed point of 1948.

In 1970 Lindsey wrote in *The Late Great Planet Earth* that “a generation in the Bible is something like forty years.”⁴ but in 1977 he said, “I don’t know how long a Biblical generation is. Perhaps somewhere between sixty and eighty years.”⁵ It is surprising how soon Lindsey forgot the forty years length of a Biblical generation—a fact that was so crucial to him in 1970 to establish that Christ will return “within forty years or so of 1948.”

Lindsey is endeavoring to buy extra time also by shifting his emphasis from the fixed date of 1948 to floating events occurring in our time. It is noteworthy that in his latest book, *The Rapture: Truth or Consequences* (1983), Lindsey makes no mention of the rebirth of Israel in 1948—an event which he discusses at great length in his previous books, calling it “the center of the entire prophetic forecast.”⁶ Instead, now he uses indefinite time references such as, “We are on the verge of this period (tribulation), which will last seven years,” or, “In all probability, most of the people reading this book will live to experience the answer” to whether the rapture will occur before, during, or after the tribulation.⁷

The combination of bold assertions and covert revisions is a common symptom of the painful awareness caused by unfulfilled predictions. Unfortunately, many uncritical believers fail to recognize this symptom and keep on believing the new revised predictions, even if the previous ones have already proved to be false.

Impersonal Events or Personal Savior? Lindsey’s excessive preoccupation with spying out the future by constructing a prophetic jigsaw puzzle of last-day events can affect adversely both Christian faith and practice. It can lead persons to look for impersonal events rather than for a personal Saviour.

To base the conviction of the imminent Return of Christ on the datable world of events rather than on the undatable reality of God’s love means to be waiting, not for a personal Savior, but for impersonal events, such as the establishment of the State of Israel, the repossession of Jerusalem, the rise of the Roman Antichrist, the rebuilding of the Jerusalem Temple, the Arab-African invasion of Israel, the destruction of the Russian army by the Roman Dictator, etc.

Waiting for events such as these to happen can cause feverish excitement and sore disappointment, both of which undermine the reality and value of the Advent Hope. The purpose of the prophetic signs of the Second Advent, as we shall see in the next chapter, is *not to pinpoint* God’s specific timetable of events leading to the End, *but to point* to the certainty of Christ’s Return and the need for constant readiness.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 5

1. W. Ward Gasque, "Future Fact? Future Fiction?" *Christianity Today*, 21 (April 15, 1977): 40.
2. John M. Mulder perceptively points out that "Like Oral Roberts, Lindsey is going respectable . . . In contrast to his earlier books, he is now more concerned with individual salvation and morality" ("The Terminal Generation," *Theology Today*, 33 [January, 1977]: 443).
3. Stanley D. Walters, "Hal Lindsey: Recalculating the Second Coming," *The Christian Century*, 96 (September 12, 1979): 839.
4. *Planet*, p. 54.
5. W. Ward Gasque, "Future Fact? Future Fiction?" *Christianity Today*, 21 (April 15, 1977): 40.
6. Hal Lindsey, *The 1980's: Countdown to Armageddon* (Toronto, New York, 1980), p. 11.
7. Hal Lindsey, *The Rapture: Truth or Consequences* (Toronto, New York, 1983), pp. 1, 23.

Chapter 6

THE NATURE OF THE ADVENT SIGNS

Without signs hope withers. It is hard to keep on hoping to see a friend again who for many years has given no signs of being alive. Christ was well aware of this human need for signs to nourish hope, and thus He gave numerous precursory signs of His Second Advent. These signs are generally known as the Advent signs or the signs of the times.

Throughout the centuries there have been Christians who have looked for the fulfillment of the Advent signs in the events of their time. Some Christians, like Lindsey, have studied the Advent signs to pinpoint God's specific timetable of events leading to Christ's Return. We have seen, for example, how Lindsey finds in Christ's reference to the budding of the fig tree (Matt 24:23-25) the time clue to calculate the approximate year of the Second Advent, namely, by 1988.

The attempts which have been made by people such as Hal Lindsey to derive from the study of Advent signs a rather precise timetable of End-time events raise the dual questions of the *nature* and *function* of the Advent signs. These two questions will be addressed in the next two chapters where we shall examine first the nature of the Advent signs and then their function. The aim of the next two chapters is to foster a legitimate use and appreciation for the precursory signs of Christ's Return.

I. THE GENERIC NATURE OF THE ADVENT SIGNS

The signs of the End given by Christ in His Olivet Discourse (which include false Christs, wars, earthquakes, famines, worldwide Gospel proclamation, tribulation) are all signs which cannot be precisely dated or fixed. Christ did not say, for example, when an earthquake completely destroys San Francisco, or when famine causes the death of hundreds of thousands in Ethiopia or Cambodia, "then you know that my Return is near."

Constant Relevance. On the contrary, Christ chose to give signs of a generic nature which could find a degree of fulfillment in every age. The reason for this is quite evident. Believers in every age need to see the Advent signs in order to experience the reassurance of the certainty and imminence of Christ's Coming.

Past and present misguided attempts to lift the veil of secrecy from God's future must not detract from the legitimate contemporizing of the Advent signs. Faith and hope in the soon-Coming of the Lord can only remain living expectations if they are sustained by reassuring signs.

II. CONTEMPORARY APPLICATION OF THE ADVENT SIGNS

The justification for contemporizing the Advent signs can be found in the example of Christ Himself who related the signs of His Return directly to His disciples: "Take heed that no one leads *you* astray . . . *you* will hear of wars and rumors of wars; see that *you* are not alarmed . . . they will deliver *you* up to tribulation . . . when *you* see the desolating sacrilege . . . I have told *you* beforehand. So, if they say to *you*, 'Lo, he is in the wilderness,' do not go out . . . when *you* see all these things, *you* know that he is near, at the very gates . . . watch therefore, for *you* do not know on what day your Lord is coming" (Matt 24:4, 6, 9, 15, 25, 33, 42; RSV).

Obviously the "*you*" means not only Christ's immediate twelve disciples, but also all His future followers. Yet we cannot ignore the fact that Christ expected His Apostles to be the first to see the fulfillment of the Advent signs. This fact indicates that the signs given by Christ are relevant to believers living in every age.

III. CONTEMPORARY RECOGNITION OF THE ADVENT SIGNS

Paul's Perception. New Testament believers recognized the contemporary application of the Advent signs. Paul, for example, saw in such signs as the Gospel's proclamation to the known world (Rom 15:19-24) and the rebellion and lawlessness being "already at work" (2 Thess 2:3, 7; 2 Tim 3:1-5), indications that "the appointed time has grown very short . . . the night is far gone, the day is at hand" (1 Cor 7:29, 31; Rom 13:12).

Peter's Perception. Peter saw in "the fiery ordeal" that was about to come upon the Christians (1 Pet 4:12)—presumably an allusion to the Neronian persecution—a sign that "the end of all things is at hand" (1 Pet 4:7).

John's Perception. John perceived in the contemporary arising of antichrists—that is, false teachers who denied the Messiahship and the incarnation of Christ (1 John 4:20)—the sign that "it is the last hour" (1 John 2:18). He draws this conclusion explicitly when he says: "You have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come; therefore we know it is the last hour" (1 John 2:18).

James' Perception. James regarded as an Advent sign the social injustice experienced by laborers who were paid unfair wages, or sometimes not paid at all by greedy rich landowners (James 5:1-9). He urges Christians to be patient because "the coming of the Lord is at hand . . . the Judge is standing at the doors" (James 4:9).

IV. DIFFERENT PERCEPTIONS OF THE ADVENT SIGNS

The above sampling of testimonies indicates that though New Testament writers share a common conviction that the Advent signs were being fulfilled in their own time, they derived such a conviction from observing different religious, political, and social developments of their times.

This fact suggests that no hard-and-fast rule can be drawn regarding which specific signs are being fulfilled at any given time or at different historical periods. What Paul perceived as being a sign of the times may not have been the same event that impressed John, Luther, you, or me.

A Sign of Divine Wisdom. This conclusion is obviously unacceptable to persons like Lindsey who view the Advent signs as unique events which are to take place only immediately before the Second Advent and not throughout the entire course of Christian history. Such a view ignores the fact that Jesus Himself, as noted earlier, contemporized the signs of His Coming by relating them directly to His disciples and His generation.

Moreover, is it not reflective of divine wisdom to have given signs which could find a degree of fulfillment in every age? Have not the Advent signs helped believers throughout history to face trials and sufferings with the assurance that ". . . the strife will not be long; This day the noise of battle, The next the victor's song"?

V. INTENSIFICATION OF THE ADVENT SIGNS

To acknowledge the existence of the Advent signs throughout Christian history does not mean to deny their intensification before Christ's Return. The Scripture teaches, as I have shown in Chapters 8, 9, and 10 of my larger study *The Advent Hope for Human Hopelessness*, that the conflict between the forces of God and the forces of Satan will intensify as we draw closer to the Second Advent. Apostasy, lawlessness, and rebellion will increase; suffering and persecution will culminate in a "great tribulation"; the Gospel will be preached as a testimony to all the nations. The intensification of these and other Advent signs offers to believers the assurance that "the end of all things is at hand" (1 Pet 4:7).

The conclusion, then, is that the Advent signs are of a generic nature, designed to discourage Lindsey's type of date-setting sensationalism and to encourage believers throughout Christian history to look forward to the final consummation of redemption to be accomplished by the Coming of the Lord. To appreciate more fully the relevance of the Advent signs for our life today, we shall consider in the next chapter "The Function of the Advent Signs."

Chapter 7

THE FUNCTION OF THE ADVENT SIGNS

Have you ever experienced the feeling of being lost, perhaps while driving on unfamiliar country roads? You eagerly looked for landmarks or road signs to determine your location on the map, but there were no recognizable signs in sight. It is hard to describe the sense of hopelessness that comes from the awareness of being lost, of not being able to reach one's destination as expected.

Recognizable signs are needed to nourish our hope to reach our destination. This is true whether we travel by car on the highways or by faith on the Christian way to the Kingdom. The aim of this chapter is briefly to examine four vital functions of the Advent signs.

I. ADVENT SIGNS NOURISH

HOPE AND FAITH

Signs Withheld. A first vital function of the Advent signs is to nourish the hope and strengthen the faith of believers. Signs and faith are not necessarily mutually exclusive. The determining factor is the attitude of belief or unbelief of the person viewing the signs. Christ withheld signs from “an evil and adulterous generation” (Matt 12:39) because no number of signs can generate faith in an incredulous and rebellious heart.

Signs Given. Signs, however, serve to strengthen the faith and nourish the hope of those who believe. Thus, after the resurrection, Christ presented Himself to His disciples “by many proofs” (Acts 1:3). Those proofs would not automatically convince hardened unbelievers, but did strengthen the faith of the believing disciples.

The attitude of belief or unbelief determines the value and meaning of the Advent signs. To an unbeliever, signs are meaningless because he fails to perceive in them the outworking of divine grace or judgement. To a believer, however, signs are meaningful because they provide constant reassurance that God is at work, bringing human history to its consummation. How do the Advent signs strengthen the faith of the believer? The subsequent sections endeavor to answer this very question.

II. ADVENT SIGNS POINT TO THE CONSUMMATION OF REDEMPTION

A Sense of Reassurance. A second important function of the Advent signs is to point forward to the imminent consummation of redemption to be realized at the Second Coming of Christ. To use an analogy, we could compare the Advent signs to *highway markers* which give the number or the name of the highway but *not* to *highway mileposts* which specify the exact distance to the nearest town.

When I drive from Chicago to Detroit, I know that I need to stay on Interstate 94 to reach my destination. Every time the Interstate 94 sign appears, I am reassured to be on the right highway to my destination. In the same way the frequent appearance of the Advent signs during the course of history have served to reassure Christians of journeying on the right way “to the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God” (Heb 11:10).

A Sense of Progression. The Advent signs offer to the believer the assurance, not only of journeying on the right way to the Kingdom, but also of drawing near to the end of the journey. The “near,” however, is never defined in terms of months or years, because the signs given by Christ are like highway markers and not like highway mileposts.

The believer who sees the appearance of the Advent signs is constantly assured of drawing nearer and nearer to the end of the journey, though he can never measure the exact distance to the End. The Advent signs *point toward* the nearness of the Advent *without pinpointing* its exact time. The latter is a secret which God has reserved for Himself (Mark 13:32).

In conclusion, the Advent signs enable believers to experience a sense of certainty and imminence, that is, the assurance of journeying on the right way and of progressing toward the end of the journey when the meeting with the Lord will take place.

III. ADVENT SIGNS CALL FOR PREPARATION, NOT CALCULATION

A third important function of the Advent signs is to call for constant readiness. A prayer I have often heard runs something like this: "Lord, help us to be ready for the day when Thou shalt come." Unintentionally, this prayer reflects a misconception, namely, that what is important in order to be saved is to be ready to receive the Lord, not necessarily today, but on the day when He will come.

Preparation not Calculation. The function of the Advent signs is to encourage, not calculation, prognostication, procrastination, but rather constant preparation and watchfulness. If the intention of Bible prophecies was to enable believers to know the exact moment when major events will occur, then these events would have been given in a precise, incontrovertible way. But this has never been the function of prophecy.

Many prophecies were given by Old Testament prophets regarding the First Advent of the Messiah, but when He came there was considerable perplexity regarding the time and manner of His Coming.¹ A major reason is that the intent of the Messianic prophecies was to nourish the Advent Hope rather than to satisfy curiosity as to the exact time and manner of Christ's Coming.

Daniel's Messianic Prophecy. It is remarkable that neither Jesus nor any New Testament writer appealed to Daniel's Messianic time prophecy (Dan 9:24-27) to prove the Messianic claims of Christ. This is all the more surprising in view of the frequent appeals to Old Testament prophecies to prove Christ's Messiahship. If the time-element of Daniel's prophecy had been clearly understood, it would have been cited, especially by Matthew who quotes Old Testament prophecies extensively to prove the Messiahship of Jesus.

The lack of any reference to Daniel's prophecy can hardly be explained as unawareness of its existence, because we are told that many calculated the actual time of the Coming of the Messiah on the basis of this prophecy. To stop prevailing time-speculations, rabbis placed a curse on anyone trying to calculate the time of the Coming of the Messiah out of Daniel's prophecy.²

Presumably the Gospel writers were aware of the various Messianic dates which had been derived from Daniel's prophecy, but they refrained from submitting an alternative date. A reason could be that they did not fully comprehend how Daniel's sixty-ninth and seventieth weeks were actually

fulfilled by Christ's life, death and resurrection. It is important to remember that generally prophecies are not fully understood before their actual fulfillment (Dan 9:1-21).

The failure of Christ's contemporaries to understand Old Testament prophecies regarding the time and nature of His First Advent cannot be explained merely as lack of faith on their part. Even a man of faith like John the Baptist was confused (Matt 11:3). Anthony A. Hoekema keenly observes that "if believers like John the Baptist could have problems of this sort with predictions about Christ's first coming, what guarantee do we have that believers will not have similar difficulties with predictions about Christ's second coming?"³

Pointing to, not Pinpointing. This warning is obviously ignored by writers like Lindsey who claim to know exactly how and when all the Advent signs will be fulfilled. For them, the purpose of the signs is not just to point to the certainty of Christ's Return and the need for constant readiness, but rather to pinpoint God's specific timetable of events leading to and following the Second Advent.

This irresponsible use of Biblical prophecies has caused and is causing disillusionments and disappointments. To avoid future disappointments, it is important to recognize that the function of the Advent signs is to encourage, not sensational prognostications, but constant preparation and watchfulness. The purpose of the signs given by Christ in His Olivet Discourse is not to inform us about the exact time or manner of His Return, but to encourage us always to be ready for such event.

The keynote of the whole discourse is: "Watch therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming" (Matt 24:42; cf. vv. 4, 3, 44; 25:13). Constant watchfulness and readiness have been encouraged by the generic nature of the signs of the times which, as noted earlier, have found a degree of fulfillment in every age.

Open to the Unexpected. To watch means to be open every day to witness and experience the unexpected. Genuine Christian living involves a constant response to the unexpected: "Watch therefore, for you do not know." Some Christians, like Lindsey, prefer to live in the false security of knowing the future. For them there is little to wait for because they have already preempted the future of any surprise with their agenda of expected End-time events.

Christians who rejoice in the divine favoritism which has granted them secret knowledge and special protection for the coming crisis wait

impatiently for divine destruction to fall upon the competitors in the next church, city, or country. The signs which Christ gave to encourage constant watchfulness and readiness have become for them signs to foster a false sense of superiority and security.

IV. ADVENT SIGNS REVEAL THE ONGOING COSMIC CONTROVERSY

Signs of Divine Grace. A fourth vital function of the Advent signs is to bear witness to the ongoing cosmic struggle between the forces of Christ and the forces of Satan. Some signs, such as the worldwide Gospel proclamation (Mark 13:10), reveal the outworking of the power of God and the growth of His Kingdom in this world.

Signs of Rebellion. Other signs, such as the proliferation of antichristian ideologies, military conflicts among nations, growth of lawlessness, persecution of Christ's followers (Mark 13:6-9), indicate that the powers of evil are at work, attempting to lead the whole world into rebellion and destruction.

The believer who witnesses the signs of the ongoing conflict between divine and satanic forces is constantly challenged to wait eagerly for the day when the Lord will come to terminate this conflict and to establish a new order of justice and righteousness upon this earth. (2 Pet 3:12).

Signs of Divine Judgment. Other signs, such as earthquakes, tornados, floods, famines, pestilences (Mark 13:8; Luke 21:11), reveal God's judgement upon human wickedness. They are harbingers of the final divine judgment to come. The Advent signs, then, tell us that there is a conflict going on in this world between divine and satanic forces, but the Lord will soon come as Savior and Judge to bring this conflict to an end.

For the believer, natural or man-made calamities are not a reason for despair, because he knows that nothing can defeat God's ultimate purpose. God is in control, working out His purpose. Unpleasant developments are to be expected and their intensification only serves to show that Christ will soon return to terminate this human drama.

A Call to Repentance. The Advent signs have a message also for unbelievers, summoning them to believe in Christ and be saved. Some incredulous and rebellious unbelievers will not respond to any number of

signs. Christ rebuked such a people for failing to discern the signs of the times (Matt 16:30; Mark 8:11). To them the signs only served to increase their condemnation.

There are people, however, who do respond to the message conveyed by the Advent signs. When these persons hear and/or see disasters, lawlessness, military conflicts, lives changed by the power of the Gospel, they are led to search for meaning and hope in their lives.

Many Christians have been led to Christ through the experience of a calamity such as internment in a concentration camp, the loss of a loved one caused by war, a tornado, an earthquake or a criminal act. In such cases, the signs of divine judgment have led to reflection, to a change of behavior and to a commitment to the Lord. Thus they have fulfilled their prophetic function of calling sinners to repentance and salvation.

A vital function of the Advent signs is, then, to reveal the ongoing controversy between the Kingdom of God and the powers of evil. This revelation challenges both believers and unbelievers to action. Believers are challenged eagerly to wait for the Lord to come to bring the conflict to an end. Unbelievers are challenged by the same signs to seek for those spiritual realities which cannot be destroyed by natural or man-made calamities.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has examined four vital functions of the Advent signs.

First, we have seen that the Advent signs have served to nourish the hope and strengthen the faith of believers in every generation.

Secondly, we have found that the Advent signs point believers constantly forward to the consummation of redemption to be realized by the Coming of the Lord.

Thirdly, we noted that the Advent signs are given in the Scripture to encourage, not calculation or prognostication, but constant preparation and watchfulness.

Lastly, we noted that the Advent signs reveal the ongoing controversy between the Kingdom of God and the power of evil. The revelation of such a conflict summons believers eagerly to wait for the Coming of the Lord who will bring the conflict to an end.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 7

1. The Advent expectations in the Old and New Testaments are examined at length in the second and third chapters of my book *The Advent Hope for Human Hopelessness*.

2. For a scholarly and comprehensive study on ancient Jewish attempts to determine the time of the Coming of the Messiah on the basis of Daniel 9:24-27, see Ben Zion Wacholder, "Chronomessianism: The Timing of Messianic Movements and the Calendar of Sabbatical Cycles," *Hebrew Union College Annual*, 46 (1975): 201ff.

3. Anthony A. Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1979), p. 133.

Chapter 8

THE TIME OF THE SECOND ADVENT

For almost two millennia many earnest Christians have agonized over the apparent delay in the Return of their Lord. Especially when the pain and trouble of this present life seemed unbearable, they have prayed: “Come, Lord Jesus!” (Rev 22:20). Many have cried, like the martyrs in Revelation 6:10, “How long, O Lord?”

How can the passing of almost twenty centuries be reconciled with the New Testament proclamation and expectation of the imminent Return of Christ? As the twenty-first century approaches, is it still rationally possible to believe and live in the expectation of the imminent Second Advent?

Answering these vital questions is not an easy task. This chapter focuses on the overall Biblical teaching regarding the time element of the Second Advent. A correct understanding of the time of the Advent can save believers from Hal Lindsey’s type of senseless speculations and calculations.

The objectives of this chapter are twofold. The first is to verify how the tension between the imminence and distance of the Advent Hope is expressed in the Old and New Testaments. The second is to consider some possible solutions to this apparent tension.

I. IMMINENCE/DISTANCE OF THE SECOND ADVENT IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

The expectation of the Coming of the Lord is expressed in the Scripture in two seemingly contradictory perspectives: as imminent on the one hand, and as distant on the other hand. The tension between these two perspectives has caused considerable confusion regarding the time of the Second Advent. It is important first of all to note that this tension is already present in the Old Testament.

Amos. One of the earliest prophets, Amos, announces the imminent day of the Lord (Amos 5:18-20) in the context of divine judgements upon Damascus, Gaza, Tyre, Edom, Moab, Judah and Israel (Amos 1:3 to 2:6). Jerusalem will be destroyed by fire (Amos 2:5) and Israel will be razed by Assyria and Egypt (Amos 3:9-11).

Beyond this impending divine visitation, Amos sees a more distant (eschatological) Day of the Lord which he describes as a day of universal judgement (Amos 7:4; 8:8-9; 9:5), and a day of salvation and restoration (Amos 9:13-15).

Zephaniah. The same tension between the nearness and the distance of the Day of the Lord is found in the message of Zephaniah. The prophet announces that “the great day of the Lord is “near, near, and hastening fast” (Zeph 1:14). 1 This imminent divine visitation is associated with destruction at the hands of some unnamed foe to come upon several nations, including Judah (Zeph 2:1 to 3:7).

In the context of this impending historical judgement, Zephaniah urges waiting for the more distant day of the Lord: “Therefore wait for me,” says the Lord, “for the day when I arise as a witness . . . to gather nations, to assemble kingdoms, to pour out upon them my indignation” (Zeph 3:8). The purpose of this final visitation is not only judgement but also salvation, both for the Gentiles and for Israel (Zeph 3:9-20).

Isaiah. The prophet Isaiah announces the nearness of the Day of the Lord with reference to the destruction of Babylon by the Medes: “Wail, for the day of the Lord is near ; as destruction from the Almighty it will come” (Is 12:6). 2 In the context of this impending historical judgement, Isaiah describes the final Day of the Lord which will be accompanied by the darkening of the sun, moon and stars (Is 13:10) and which “will punish the world for its evil and the wicked for their iniquity” (Is 13:11).

The sense of distance of this final Day of the Lord is sometimes expressed in Isaiah and in other prophets by indefinite phrases such as “in the latter days,” “in that day,” “afterwards.”³

II. THE IMMINENCE OF THE SECOND ADVENT IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Imminence Texts. The tension between the imminent expectation and the future realization of the Advent Hope is found even more explicitly in the New Testament. The sense of imminence is suggested first of all by the

three noteworthy “imminence texts” (Mark 9:1; 13:30; Matt 10:23), examined at length in the fifth chapter of *The Advent Hope for Human Hopelessness*.

Numerous other verses underline the imminence of Christ’s Return. For example, Paul writes to the Romans: “For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed; the night is far gone, the day is at hand” (Rom 13:11-17).⁴

“We Passages.” In several other statements Paul indicates that he hoped for an imminent Return of Christ. For example, in the so-called “we passages,” which are found in 1 Thessalonians 4:15, 17 and 1 Corinthians 15:51-52, Paul expresses the hope to be found alive at the coming of the Lord: “we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord” (1 Thess 4:15).⁵

That Paul ardently hoped for an imminent Return of Christ, possibly during his lifetime, is suggested also by his counsel to the unmarried to remain single because “the form of this world is passing away” (1 Cor 7:31). Note should be taken of the fact, however, that Paul, contrary to persons like Lindsey, never took the liberty of translating his ardent hope into a definite timetable of End-time events.

Other Examples. James admonishes believers to “be patient” and not to grumble “for the coming of the Lord is at the doors” (James 5:8-9). Similarly, Peter urges believers to “keep sane and sober” because “the end of all things is at hand” (1 Pet 4:7).⁶ The last book of the Bible opens by announcing “what must soon take place” (Rev 1:1) and closes by affirming “Surely I am coming soon” (Rev 22:20).⁷

III. THE DISTANCE OF THE SECOND ADVENT IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Distance in Christ’s Sayings. Side by side with those texts which suggest the imminence of Christ’s Return, there are other texts which place the event in a more distant future. A sense of distance is suggested by the precursory Advent signs given by Christ. For example, in Matthew 24:14 Jesus says: “And this gospel will be preached throughout the whole world, as a testimony to all nations; and then the end will come.” The time involved in reaching the whole world with the Gospel as well as the words “and then” imply the elapsing of considerable time before the Second Advent.

Distance is also implied by the time required for the fulfillment of the various pre-Advent conditions predicted, such as intensification of warfare, natural disasters, increased wickedness. A sense of distance is particularly suggested by the statement that even after the fulfillment of these conditions “the end is not yet” (Mark 13:7; Matt 24:6).

Distance in Christ’s Parables. Several of Christ’s parables point to a long waiting time between His death and His Return. Matthew directly links the Olivet discourse with the parables of the Faithful and the Unfaithful Servants, the Ten Virgins and the Talents, all of which suggest the elapsing of considerable time before the Lord’s Return. The unfaithful servant said: “My master is delayed” (Matt 24:48) ⁸ and began living immorally and intemperately. The master rebukes the servant not because of his awareness of the delay, but rather because of his irresponsible conduct during the delay.

In the parable of the Ten Virgins, “the bridegroom was delayed, (and) they all slumbered and slept” (Matt 25:5).⁹ The focus is on the conduct of the virgins during the delay of the bridegroom. The same point is made in the parable of the Talents, when it says: “Now after a long time the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them” (Matt 25:19.) ¹⁰

The similar parable of the Pounds, according to Luke, was related by Christ “because they supposed that the kingdom of God was to appear immediately” (Luke 19:11). To correct this misunderstanding, the parable speaks of a nobleman who went into a far country and then returned to settle accounts with his servants. The distant destination of the nobleman suggests that his return might have been a long way off in time. ¹¹

Other parables found in Matthew 13 such as that of the Tares, of the Mustard Seed and of the Leaven, also suggest the possibility of a long lapse of time before the End. The Tares—which represent the unbelievers—are to coexist side by side with believers to the end; the Mustard Seed—which stands for the small band of Christ’s followers—is to become an impressive group; the Leaven—which typifies the Kingdom of God, hidden initially—is to become manifest.

The elements of growth, development and manifestation which are respectively present in these parables suggest the passing of considerable time before Christ’s Return. The conclusion that emerges then is that although Jesus proclaimed His Return as imminent, He also allowed for a considerable time to elapse before its occurrence.

Distance in Paul's Writings. The same tension between imminence and distance is found in Paul's writings. We noted earlier that in Romans 13 the apostle speaks of the nearness of the end ("the night is far gone, the day is at hand"—v. 12). Yet in the preceding chapters (9 to 11) Paul describes how the ingathering of the Gentiles would ultimately lead to the salvation of Israel (Rom 11:25-26). Obviously the outworking of this process presupposes the elapse of considerable time before the End.

Similarly, in his letters to the Thessalonians, Paul urges Christians to "keep awake and be sober" (1 Thess 5:6) because the day may come at any moment, yet he also begs the same believers "not to be quickly shaken in mind or excited" (2 Thess 2:2) because "that day will not come, unless" (v. 3) certain developments first occur.

Distance in Revelation. The last book of the Bible provides a final example. As noted earlier, Revelation opens and closes announcing the soon-Coming of the Lord (Rev 1:1; 22:20; cf. 3:11). Yet throughout the book there is expressed a sense of a long waiting time before the Second Advent.

The martyrs cry: "O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before thou wilt judge and avenge our blood?" (Rev 6:10). The answer they receive is "to rest a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brethren should be complete" (Rev 6:11). The latter process presupposes a waiting period which could be rather long.

The same thought is conveyed in the vision of the Two Witnesses and the Woman, both of whom are promised a period of 1260 days during which the former were to prophesy and the latter was to be protected (Rev 11:3; 12:6).

In summary we might say that the New Testament presents the Second Coming of Christ in a seemingly paradoxical tension: imminent and yet possibly distant. How can this tension be resolved? The problem is not only hermeneutical, that is how to interpret apparent contradictory texts, but also existential, that is, how to live in the consciousness of the nearness of Christ's Coming while accepting the possibility of a long waiting time.

Different solutions have been proposed for this problem. In the remaining part of this chapter we shall briefly consider, first the solution advanced by liberal scholars, and then, four significant clues, which in my view help resolve this tension.

IV. A CRISIS OF FAITH

Liberal scholars generally explain the imminence/distance Advent tension as being the result of a crisis of faith experienced by first-century Christians. This crisis was supposedly provoked by the fact that Christ did not return as expected within the lifetime of His generation. To explain away their disappointment, Christians recast their Advent Hope in an unknown and possibly distant future time.¹²

No Bitter Disappointment. No doubt there are traces in the New Testament of an early expectation of Christ's Coming. But there are no indications suggesting that Christians experienced a bitter disappointment which forced them to recast their hopes into a more distant future-fulfillment of the Second Advent.

There is no chapter in the history of New Testament Christianity like that of the Millerite movement which is called "The Great Disappointment." When Christ did not return as expected in 1844, the vast majority of Millerites gave up their Advent Hope. But no traces can be found in early Christianity of a mass apostasy caused by Christ's failure to return before the passing away of the apostolic generation.

No Crisis of Faith. A crisis of faith in Christ's Return can only occur if such a faith is based upon the presumption of knowing the date of the Second Advent. Such a presumption is not found in the New Testament Church, which was reconciled to a possible long waiting time because she was already experiencing the "first fruits" (Rom 8:23) of the greater future Advent harvest of blessings.

As long as a believer experiences in the present the blessings of salvation already provided through Christ's death, resurrection, and heavenly ministry, any apparent "delay" of the Second Advent cannot lead to a crisis of faith. There are no traces of a crisis of faith regarding the Parousia in the New Testament Church.

The foregoing considerations exclude the "crisis of faith" explanation. The faith of the earliest Christians was not shaken by any perception of an apparent "delay" of Christ's Return, because, as Paul eloquently expresses it, "I am sure that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil 1:6).

V. THE EXISTENTIAL TIME OF THE ADVENT HOPE

Empirical Versus Existential Time. A first important clue which helps to resolve the tension between the imminence and distance of the New Testament Advent Hope is suggested by the existential nature of the Biblical references to the time of Christ's Return. To appreciate the latter, it is important to distinguish between two different notions of time: empirical and existential time.

Empirical Time is the common notion of time which is measured by the clock. The person who flies from Chicago to Los Angeles looks at the watch from time to time to see how many more hours or minutes still remain before the arrival. This empirical time is abstract, impersonal, and it can be fixed and measured with accuracy.

Existential Time, or perhaps "lover's time," is the time which exists in the world of love and is measured not by the clock but by love and faith. In the world of love, time is real but it "flies."

The person who waits only for empirical, chronological time to pass finds such time to be unbearably slow. On the other hand, the person who experiences time in reference to a beloved person finds that time does in fact rush by. Of Jacob it is said that he "served seven years for Rachel, and they seemed to him but a few days because of the love he had for her" (Gen 29:20).¹³

The notion of existential time experienced in a love-relationship can help us resolve the Biblical tension between the nearness and the remoteness of Christ's Return, because the event expected is not something impersonal, but rather the personal Return of our Savior. The Second Advent is the occasion to see "face to face" the One whom now "we see in a mirror dimly" (1 Cor 13:12).

This hope to see the Return of the beloved Lord enables the believer to live in the expectancy of His imminent Return while open to the possibility of a long waiting period. Two persons who love one another have reason to hope to see one another soon, even if the separation is going to be chronologically rather long.

A Personal Experience. When I left my fiancée in Italy to come to the USA for my seminary training, we bade each other farewell saying: "Time is going to pass quickly. Soon we shall be together again." We were well aware that we would be separated for one year or more, but we chose to live in the awareness not of the long months of waiting but of the imminent reunion. Thus "soon" for us meant primarily a certain reunion. This notion of time experienced in a love relationship offers us an important clue to

understand the Biblical tension between the imminence and the distance of the Second Advent. When a love relationship exists between the believer and Christ, believing in and hoping for His imminent Return becomes a natural necessity. To accept the present salvation that Christ offers us without believing in His imminent Return, would be like becoming engaged without ever hoping to get married. The believer who has already experienced the invisible and yet real presence and power of Christ has every reason to live in the joyful expectation of the imminent, visible appearing of the Savior (Titus 2:12).

A Little While. The existential time experienced in a love relationship enables us to understand the significance of such words of Jesus as those recorded in John 16:16: “A little while, and you will see me no more; again a little while, and you will see me” (cf. John 14:18-19). By describing the time that would elapse between His Departure and Return as “a little while” (mikron), Christ was not informing His disciples on chronology, but rather He was assuring them of the certainty of their future Reunion.. In other words, Christ was speaking not of clock time but of lover’s time.

The waiting time mentioned by Christ is “a little while,” not because it would consist of only a few years, but because during His absence we can live intensively in the reality of His love and certainty of His Return. A short waiting time may seem like an eternity when one lives in fear and uncertainty. On the other hand, years may seem like days when lived intensively and serenely in the certainty of the love of the expected person. Thus, the love relationship that exists between Christ and the believer makes it possible to live in the expectation of the imminent Return of Christ while open to the possibility of a long waiting.

VI. THE UNITY OF THE ADVENT HOPE

A second important clue to resolve the imminence-distance tension of the Second Advent is suggested by the essential unity which exists in the New Testament between the First and the Second Advent. This unity is expressed in several significant ways.

Dual Meaning of Key Terms. One example is the dual meaning attached to the three terms Parousia, Revelation, Appearing, which are used in the New Testament to designate both the past and the future Coming of Christ. This dual meaning indicates that for the New Testament believer, the future Advent, though possibly distant, could be intensively felt as imminent,

because it was conceptually and existentially linked to the reality of Christ's First Coming which inaugurated the End-time age.

The End of the Age. The unity of the Advent Hope is also expressed by such phrases as "the last days," and "the end of the age" (Acts 2:17; Heb 9:26). These phrases designate in the New Testament the age inaugurated by Christ when He came the first time "to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself" (Heb 9:26). That age is viewed as the final age because Christ is already offering to believers the down payment of their future inheritance to be fully received at His Return.

The Second Advent is near because the believer already enjoys a foretaste of its blessings and privileges, made possible through the First Advent. Having already experienced through the indwelling Spirit a taste of "the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come" (Heb 6:5), the believer lives in the expectancy of the imminent consummation of salvation. Thus the chronological distance to the Coming of the Lord is shortened through the initial experience of the ultimate blessing of the Kingdom.

The Lord's Prayer. The Lord's Prayer provides another example of how the New Testament reconciles the tension between the nearness and distance of the Kingdom. The Prayer opens with the petition, "Thy kingdom come" and closes with the doxology, "For thine is the Kingdom" (Matt 6:10, 13). Thus, the Kingdom inaugurated by the Advent is both future and present, far and near. The distance between the two, as Paul S. Minear notes, "is measured primarily not by space and time but by such specific concerns as the accomplishment of God's will, the gift of daily bread, the forgiveness of sin and the deliverance from the evil one." 14

The Lord's Supper. The unity of the Advent Hope is expressed especially vividly through the symbolic significance of the Lord's Supper. The drinking of the cup and the partaking of the bread are viewed as a proclamation of "the Lord's death till he comes" (1 Cor 11:26). The distance between the Passion and the Parousia is shortened because the two events are seen as inseparable.

When partaking of the Lord's Supper, the believer accepts symbolically the present salvation which is both past and future, Passion and Parousia. Though the Parousia may be far away in terms of chronological time, yet it is near in terms of salvation time because its reality is already a present certainty and experience.

There is an essential unity among the events of the Incarnation, Crucifixion, Resurrection, Ascension, and Heavenly Ministration and Sec-

ond Advent. This unity enables New Testament writers to reconcile the apparent tension between the imminence and the distance of the Second Advent, for it is the same expected Savior who has already appeared and who is presently appearing before the Father on our behalf, who ultimately “will appear a second time ... to save those who are eagerly waiting for him” (Heb 9:24-26).¹⁶

VII. MORAL URGENCY OF THE ADVENT HOPE

A third important clue which explains the nearness-remoteness tension of the Second Advent is to be found in the ethical purpose of such a tension. If Christ’s Return had been tied to specific signs which made it possible to calculate chronologically either the nearness or the remoteness of the Event, then any preparation would be conditioned by the date factor. Knowing the date means to be tempted to postpone until tomorrow the preparation that should be done today.

Preparation, not Calculation. The tension between imminence and distance is designed to discourage date-setting, while on the other hand, it demands constant watchfulness and readiness. Authors like Hal Lindsey fail to recognize that in the famous Olivet Discourse we find two distinct emphases: nearness and remoteness. The nearness is suggested by the significance of the given signs, namely, “that he is near, at the very gates” (Mark 13:29). The remoteness is indicated by the time needed for the signs themselves to be fulfilled and more explicitly by the statement that even when they occur, “the end is not yet” (Mark 13:7).

The purpose of this tension is obviously ethical, namely, to discourage calculation of the date and to encourage constant preparation for the Lord’s Return. Much of the Olivet Discourse is cast in the form of exhortation. For example: “Take heed” (Mark 13:5, 9, 23, 33), “Do not be alarmed” (v. 7), “Do not be anxious” (v. 11), “Watch therefore, for you do not know when the master of the house will come” (v. 35). These exhortations highlight the purpose of the time references, namely, to encourage preparation and endurance, and not sensational speculations.¹⁶

Constant Readiness. It is important to recognize the close link between the predictions regarding the Advent and the ethical concerns of Jesus and the New Testament writers. They predict Christ’s Return as future and yet imminent, because they are concerned with emphasizing the impact of the future upon the present.

Like the Old Testament prophets, New Testament writers speak of nearness and distance, not to suggest a method for constructing a chronology, but to urge repentance and readiness. The “near” indicates that the Advent is not merely a futuristic possibility beyond our horizons, but a present, inescapable and decisive challenge to live now in readiness for the Lord’s Return.

The servant who chose to live with reference to a distant return of his master, saying: “My master is delayed in coming” (Luke 12:45), is the servant who became unfaithful, irresponsible and immoral in his conduct. On the other hand, the servant who lived in the constant expectation of his master’s return was found faithfully discharging his duties.

These observations indicate then that the tension between imminence and distance is an essential ingredient of the Advent Hope. It is designated to discourage Lindsey’s type of date-setting sensationalism and to encourage constant readiness for Christ’s Return.

VIII. THE PROPHETIC PERSPECTIVE OF THE ADVENT HOPE

A fourth significant clue to understand the tension between the imminence and distance of the Advent Hope is provided by what has been called “prophetic perspective.” This perspective enabled the prophets to hold the present and the future, the near and the far, in a dynamic relationship.

Anticipation of the Future. Isaiah 13, for example, as noted earlier, describes the distant Day of the Lord in the setting of the imminent destruction of Babylon (vv. 9-11). The Day of the Lord was near because imminent divine judgment upon Babylon were seen as an anticipation of the final divine visitation. Each judgement and each deliverance was seen by the prophets as a partial realization of the ultimate accomplishments of the Day of the Lord.

The same prophetic perspective is present in the teaching of Jesus and of New Testament writers. In Mark 13 the imminent destruction of Jerusalem (vv. 14-23) is presented in the immediate context of the Coming of the Son of Man (vv. 24-17). The first event is viewed as an anticipation of the final judgment to take place at the Parousia.

What or When? It is difficult for our minds—trained to measure time quantitatively rather than qualitatively—to appreciate the prophetic perspective. We measure time with our clocks and calendars in hours, days, months and years in order to establish with accuracy when an event or action

is to take place. In Biblical thought, however, often the important question is not “When?” but “What?”

The disciples asked Jesus: “Tell us, when will this be, and what will be the sign when these things are all to be accomplished?” (Mark 13:4). In His answer Christ offers no sign by which the “When,” that is, the day or the year of the End, can be calculated. In fact, He emphatically affirms: “But of that day or that hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father” (Mark 13:32). What Christ explains is not the “when” but the “what,” the condition which will characterize the waiting time.

This condition is characterized essentially by conflict in the religious, political, social, and cosmic order. Amid this conflict, Christ’s followers must proclaim to all nations the Good News of the Kingdom (Mark 13:10; Matt 24:14). The Gospel proclamation indicates that human history is not abandoned to evil, but is moving toward the day when the Son of Man will come to bring all conflicts to an end (Mark 13:26-27).

The triumphs of the Gospel, as well as the present conflicts, are signs that “he is near at the very gates” (Mark 13:29), because they tell us that the ultimate conflict which will usher in the triumphant Kingdom of God is already transpiring in the present.

Two Extremes. The believer who sees the present conflicts and triumphs as signs that Christ is acting redemptively in the present to bring His future Kingdom to its consummation, shares in the prophetic perspective which makes it possible to maintain the imminence and the distance of the Advent Hope in a balanced, dynamic tension.

The loss of this prophetic perspective results in two major opposite errors. Some are led to abandon the hope of a real future Coming of the Lord in favor of a present existential realization of God’s Kingdom. Others, like Lindsey, are led to ignore the present outworking of God’s Kingdom in favor of speculations regarding dates and events related to the time of the Advent.

To avoid these two extremes, we need to recover the prophetic perspective which enables us to shorten chronological time spans by looking at the future through the transparency of the present outworkings of God. The Advent of the Lord, though still in the future, yet is near, because the same Lord who has acted and is presently acting redemptively will act to bring His kingdom to its consummation on the Day of His Parousia.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter we have seen that the New Testament speaks of the time of the Second Advent in seemingly contradictory terms: imminent and yet possibly distant. We have found that such a tension was not provoked by a crisis of faith when the Lord failed to return within the lifetime of His generation, but rather that this tension is an essential component of the Biblical Advent Hope.

Some of the significant functions of the imminence/distance tension which we have considered are: (1) to help believers experience in the present the reality of the future; (2) to emphasize the unity of the past, present, and future salvation; (3) to urge not calculation but constant preparation; (4) to encourage a prophetic perspective by which a believer looks at the future through the transparency of the present Advent signs.

Among all that is difficult to comprehend in Biblical prophecies, Christ's promise to come again stands out for its clarity, centrality and certainty. Its certainty rests not on a fictitious prophetic jigsaw puzzle like the one constructed by Hall Lindsey, but on the factual redemptive accomplishments of Christ and on the experience of His power and grace in the life of believers.

While the sensational End-time scenario of authors like Lindsey is a fiction which can only lead to disappointments, the certainty of Christ's imminent Return is a fact which today can offer comfort and motivation to all believers called to live among the uncertainties and troubles of this present world.

The remaining three chapters will examine the Biblical reasons for believing in the certainty, imminence and relevance of the Advent Hope for today.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 8

1. Emphasis supplied.
2. Emphasis supplied.
3. See, for example, Is 2:2, 20; Hos 3:5; Ezek 38:16; Jer 30:8; Joel 2:28-29.

4. Emphasis supplied.
5. Emphasis supplied.
6. See also Heb 10:25.
7. Emphasis supplied.
8. Emphasis supplied.
9. Emphasis supplied.
10. Emphasis supplied.

11. A similar point is made in the parable of the Faithful and Wise Steward (Luke 12:41-48). The statement of the unfaithful servant who says: “My master is delayed in coming” (v. 45), implies that there will indeed be a “delay” which will serve to differentiate between the faithful and the unfaithful stewards.

12. For valuable discussion about the proponents and arguments of the “crisis of faith” view, see G. C. Berkouwer, *The Return of Christ* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1972), pp. 66-67.

13. Emphasis supplied.

14. Paul S. Minear, *Christian Hope and the Second Coming* (Philadelphia, 1954), p. 10

15. C. E. B. Cranfield aptly emphasizes this point, saying: “The clue to the meaning of the nearness of the End is the realization of the essential unity of God’s Saving Acts in Christ—the realization that the Events of the Incarnation, Crucifixion, Resurrection, Ascension, and Parousia are in a real sense one Event” (“St. Mark 13,” *Scottish Journal of Theology*, VII (1954): 288). George Ladd offers also a persceptive analysis of the essential unity of the Advent Hope in his book *The Presence of the Future* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1974), pp. 322-324.

16. The generic nature of the Advent signs provides another indication. Earthquakes, famine, political conflicts, world-wide Gospel preaching, are hardly the kind of signs which can be used to date the particular moment in history when Christ will come. They are the kind of events which characterize the conditions existing between the First and Second Advent. The purpose of the Advent signs is not to make date calculations possible, but to nourish the hope of the imminent Return of the Lord, and thus to encourage constant readiness and watchfulness.

Chapter 9

THE CERTAINTY OF THE ADVENT HOPE

More than 19 centuries ago Jesus promised His disciples, troubled at the thought of His departure from this world, “I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.” John 14:3. ¹

Since that time most Christians have professed to believe Christ’s promise. The so-called Apostles’ Creed includes the statement: “I believe in Jesus Christ who . . . shall come to judge the quick and the dead.” When the pain and problems of life have seemed unbearable, many Christians have prayed: “Come, Lord Jesus!” (Rev 22:20). Some have even cried, like the martyrs in Revelation 6:10, “How long, O lord?” (KJV). For almost 150 years Seventh-day Adventists have proclaimed to the world the soon return of Jesus.

Theological Skepticism. Now that the twenty-first century is almost here is it still rationally possible to believe, to proclaim, and to live in the certainty that Jesus will return to our earth soon? Many Christians feel that the answer is No. They have chosen either to neglect or to reject the hope of the soon-coming Saviour.

The Roman Catholic Church, for example, decided on July 29, 1944, through its Congregation of the Holy Office, that Catholics no longer need to believe in a visible return of Christ because the church cannot teach the doctrine with certainty. ² Anthony Wilhelm’s *Christ Among Us*, a best-seller presentation of the Catholic faith, demonstrates this new Catholic position.

Many Protestants share the same view. Rudolf Bultmann, a renowned Protestant theologian, believed that the notion of Christ’s return is “incredible not only for the scientist but for every modern man.” ³ Georgia Harkness wrote in *Christian Century*: “Few American Christians would dispute the truth and supreme importance of Christ’s ‘first’ and ‘continual’ coming. Many are obliged to doubt that a ‘second’ coming . . . is essential to the Christian hope of Christ’s final triumph.” ⁴

Existential Skepticism. Besides those who openly reject any belief in Christ's return, others show by their lifestyle that the Advent hope is hardly present for them. Their efforts to acquire and enjoy the goods and gadgets of this life suggest that they view the present world not as a waiting room to the world Christ will usher in at His coming, but as a living room in which to enjoy life as though Christ may never come. Someone has said that twentieth-century Christians are the best-disguised set of pilgrims this world has ever seen.

I. CAUSES FOR UNCERTAINTY

What are some of the causes for this prevailing uncertainty about Jesus' return? Are there reasons for still believing that Jesus will come soon and that His Return is certain? Let us look first at some reasons why so many Christians today have given up believing that Jesus will return as He promised to do.

The idea of individual immortality. Perhaps the single most important theological reason for uncertainty about the Second Coming is the doctrine that the individual soul survives apart from the body after death. The Roman Catholic Church and most mainline Protestant churches hold this view. It is not difficult to see how believing that after death the soul of the believer immediately ascends to the blessedness of paradise could obscure, or even eclipse, any expectation of the second coming.

Christians who believe that at death they go up to their Lord in heaven, can hardly be expected to have much concern about preparing themselves for the coming of Christ down to this earth. For them, Christ's coming at best will only intensify the bliss of heaven or the pain of hell by adding some sort of body to their disembodied souls.

The primary concern of Christians with such a belief is to reach heaven immediately after death and/or to help their loved ones to pass quickly through the cleansing suffering of purgatory into the blessedness of paradise. These concerns obviously overshadow any hope or need for the Lord Jesus to come to this earth.

The concept of survival after death as a disembodied soul is rooted not in Biblical thought but in Greek philosophy, particularly that of Plato. The hope that the Bible holds out to us is not the possibility that our souls will go up at death to heaven to meet our Lord, but that Jesus will come down to this earth to resurrect the sleeping saints and to translate the living believers. Biblical hope focuses on a real meeting upon this earth between believers and Christ on the glorious day of His coming.

Sensational Interpretation of Prophecies. Sensational, but senseless, applications of Biblical prophecies to contemporary events have caused uncertainty in the minds of many about the Advent Hope. Hal Lindsey, for example, predicted in 1970 that millions of Christians would be secretly raptured to heaven by the early 1980s and that the final seven-year countdown to Armageddon would be going.

As Lindsey expressed it in the very title of one of his books, *The 1980s: Countdown to Armageddon*, major events were supposed to have occurred in this decade such as the rise of the Roman Antichrist out of the European Common Market nations, the signing of a peace treaty between the Roman Antichrist and the State of Israel, the rebuilding of the Jerusalem temple, the invasion of the State of Israel by Russia and Egypt, a counterattack by the combined armies of the Common Market countries and Red China, the final battle of Armageddon, and the victorious return of Christ by 1988.⁵

Time has already amply identified most of Lindsey's predictions as fiction. However, such irresponsible interpretations of Biblical prophecies not only cause disillusionment and disappointment to the millions who accept them as truth, but they also aid the critics who are only too glad to caricature the entire belief in a personal return of Christ to this earth by such vagaries.

Misconceptions about New World. Popular misconceptions about the new world Christ will establish at His coming, have weakened the certainty and expectation of Christ's Return. Most Christians view the world to come as a place beautiful but unreal, a spiritual retreat center somewhere off in space where the solid joys of this present life must be exchanged for a vague and ethereal existence of eternal adoration and contemplation, a place where "in mansions of glory and endless delight / I'll ever adore Thee in heaven so bright."

This vision of a Saviour coming soon to establish a spiritual world where glorified souls will spend eternity wearing white robes, singing, playing harps, praying, and eating ambrosia, can hardly inspire twentieth-century Christians who love the sights and sounds of the real world around them.

The idea of an ethereal future life has come from Greek philosophy and not from Biblical teachings. Both the Old and New Testaments picture the new world Jesus will establish at His Return as being nothing else but this planet Earth, purified, transformed, and perfected. See Isaiah 65:17; 32:15; 11:6; 2 Peter 3:11-13; Romans 8:19-25; Revelation 21:1.

The very imagery of the city of New Jerusalem to which “the kings of the earth shall bring their glory . . . and the honor of the nations” (Rev 21:24-26) conveys the idea of activity, vitality, creativity, and real relationship. Unfortunately, this Biblical view of the new world has been largely replaced in popular piety with a spiritualized conception of heaven which makes well-meaning persons indifferent, if not resentful, toward the Second Advent.

Humanistic Theologies. Existential and liberation theologies have weakened the Advent Hope by making God’s Kingdom primarily a present reality. Liberation theologies such as the Theology of Liberation, Black Theology, and the Theology of Hope seek to establish God’s future Kingdom by improving present social conditions and political systems rather than by preparing people for the coming of the Lord.

Existential theologies view the Second Advent as a first-century mythical conception which symbolizes the timeless truth of God’s ultimate triumph and which makes eternity real to the present existence of the believer. Existentialists see the Second Advent not as a future realization of present expectations, but rather as a present experience of the future. Both liberation and existential theologies empty our present life of meaning by depriving us of a goal and motivation for responsible living in view of the Lord’s coming.

Skeptical attitudes. Materialistic ideologies and the apparent “delay” in Christ’s Return have also encouraged skepticism regarding the Second Advent. Western technology and the economic system’s success in generating goods and wealth have given rise to a twofold philosophy: On one hand, the obsession to acquire and enjoy as many materialistic possessions as possible, and on the other hand, the perception that man himself has the resources to establish a new and better social order without having to wait for Christ’s Coming to usher in a new world.

The apparent “delay” of Christ’s Return has also led some people to question the reality of His Coming. As in Peter’s time, they scoff at the notion that Christ will return saying: “Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things have continued as they were from the beginning of creation” (2 Pet 3:4). Peter responds to these scoffers by challenging their motives and by explaining that what many interpret as “slowness” is in reality a revelation of God’s compassion, who is “not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance” (v. 9).

Others interpret the apparent “delay” as an indication that Christ’s Return still lies in a far-distant, almost-irrelevant future. Like the unwise steward who said, “My master is delayed in coming” (Luke 12:45), they think

that they can do what they wish while the Master is away and that they still have plenty of time to make things right before He comes.

The foregoing observations indicate that various theological, humanistic, materialistic and existential factors, have contributed to the prevailing indifference and uncertainty about Christ's Return.

II. REASONS FOR CERTAINTY

With so many doubting or rejecting the idea that Jesus will return, are there reasons for still believing that it will happen and happen soon? Yes. I believe that Christians can still believe in the certainty of the advent hope. Here are five reasons for believing that Jesus' promise is still valid today.

Central Biblical Teaching. A first reason for believing in the certainty of the Second Advent is that among all that is difficult to understand in Scripture, the promise of Christ's Return stands out for its clarity, centrality, and certainty. In a sense, Biblical history is the Story of the Advent, the story of God who came down to this planet to create, who came down to redeem, and who ultimately will come down again to restore this world and His people.

In most ancient pagan religions, salvation came about by human beings going up to seek God. In Biblical revelation, salvation results from God coming down to seek and save His creatures.

The Old Testament speaks of the Lord who will come, and the New Testament speaks of the Lord who has come and who will come again. In the Old Testament, the Advent Hope grew in content, scope, and expectation. From an indefinite hope of victory expressed in Genesis 3:15, the hope of the Lord's coming unfolded progressively as the coming of a prophet like Moses (Deut 18:15-18), a king like David (2 Sam 7:12-16), a child deliverer (Is 7:14; 9:6; 11:1-8), a suffering servant (Is 52:13-15; 53), and a heavenly Son of man (Dan 7:13,14). This composite portrait of the expected Lord highlighted the uniqueness and richness of His life and ministry.

The New Testament expresses the Advent Hope in two ways: as already fulfilled by Christ's first Advent and as yet-to-be consummated at His Second Advent. The first Advent is seen as the inauguration and the anticipation of the final age that will be consummated at the second advent. The coverage that the New Testament gives to the Return of Christ is impressive. The Gospels report numerous sayings, two long speeches, and

several parables in which Jesus presents His future coming as glorious, visible, imminent, sudden, and personal. An estimated one verse out of every 25 in the New Testament refers to the second advent.

To doubt the certainty of the Advent Hope means to doubt one of the most clear and central of Biblical teachings and to be left without any real hope for a better world to come. It means to be a pilgrim journeying on a road leading nowhere.

The Guarantee of the First Advent. A second reason for believing in the certainty of Christ's Return is the fact that Christ by His first coming has guaranteed His Return. If he had not come the first time and had not won a decisive victory over sin and Satan, then we would have no basis for believing that He will come again the second time to consummate and celebrate His victory. But since we know that "he has appeared once for all at the end of the age to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself" (Heb 9:26), then we have reason to believe that He "will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him" (v. 28).

The first Advent can be compared, to use Oscar Cullmann's fitting example, to D-day, that is, to the decisive battle won in the early stage of a war; while the Second Advent is like V-day, that is, to the final surrender of the enemy and celebration of the victory.⁶ Our certainty of the final victory at the Second Advent is nourished by the unshakable assurance that Christ has already won the decisive battle at His first Advent, when He "disarmed the principalities and powers and made a public example of them, triumphing over them" (Col 2:15).

The New Testament sees Jesus' first and second comings as two manifestations of the same event: the Advent of the Lord. The unity between the two comings is exemplified especially by the vocabulary the Bible uses, three terms—coming (parousia), revelation (apokalypsis), and appearing (epiphaneia)—all of which are used to describe both the first and the second Advents (See 2 Pet 1:16; 1 Thess 3:13; Rev 1:1; 2 Thess 1:7; and Titus 2:11-13). This means that the first Advent guarantees the certainty of Christ's future glorious appearing, revelation, and coming.

The Ministry of the Holy Spirit. A third reason for believing in the certainty of Christ's Return is the ministry of the Holy Spirit which enables us to experience in the present a foretaste of the blessings of the Second Advent. A vital function of the Holy Spirit's ministry is to help us experience in this present life an anticipation of the greater blessings to be received at Christ's coming.

The gifts of the Spirit that we experience here—”love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control” (Gal 5:22,23)—the Bible calls “the first fruits” (Romans 8:23) of the great Advent harvest to come. The uncertainty that many feel about the reality of the Second Advent may well reflect the absence of the Holy Spirit’s influence in their lives. We cannot grasp spiritual realities through mere intellectual reasoning, but through the reception and illumination of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 2:12,14). Through the Spirit we taste “the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come” (Heb 6:5).

The Heavenly Ministry of Christ. A fourth reason for believing in the certainty of Christ’s Return is the fact that Christ is actively working in heaven to bring to consummation the redemption already accomplished on this earth. Many Christians are uncertain about Christ’s Return because they wonder what He is doing in heaven. Surprisingly, many seem to feel that He is doing very little. Even standard systematic theology books have little to say about Christ’s heavenly ministry, thus giving the impression that at the ascension Christ took a leave of absence.

The New Testament, however, describes the interim period between Christ’s ascension and His coming as a time of intense activity in the heavenly sanctuary on behalf of believers. Christ is actively working in heaven to bring to consummation the redemption already accomplished on this earth. The Bible describes the SAviour’s heavenly ministry by such human analogies as “priest” (Heb 7:15; 8:4; 10:21), “high priest” (Heb 2:17; 3:1; 4:14; 9:11), “mediator” (1 Tim 2:5; Heb 8:6; 9:15), and “intercessor” (Rom 8:34; Heb 7:25).

The assurance of Christ’s present ministry in the heavenly sanctuary gives us reason to hope that “he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ” (Phili 1:6). When I left my fiancée in Italy to come to study in the United States, I promised her that I would study hard to finish my education so that we could be together again. The thought that I was making every effort to bring our dream to consummation sustained my fiancée during the 18 months of separation. In the same way the time between the first and second Advents is shortened by the confidence that Christ is actively working to bring to consummation the redemption already accomplished on this earth. The lack of this confidence in Christ’s heavenly ministry accounts to a large degree for the uncertainty many Christians feel regarding the reality of His coming. If Jesus’ heavenly ministry, the link that joins the first and second Advents, is broken then it is hardly possible to keep alive one’s faith and hope in a soon-coming Saviour.⁷

5. The Fulfillment of End-time Signs. The unparalleled fulfillment in our day of the End-time signs given by Christ and expanded upon by several New Testament writers gives certainty to our conviction that Jesus is coming soon. In His Olivet Discourse Christ describes certain specific conditions that will prevail prior to His coming and the end of the world (Matt 24; Mark 13).

Although these signs have found a degree of fulfillment in every age—because they were intended to nourish the hope and strengthen the faith of believers throughout history—their fulfillment is intensifying today, as predicted in Scripture. For example, the sign of the gospel proclamation throughout the whole world (Matt 24:14; Mark 13:10) is being fulfilled in an unprecedented way in our generation. From being a pre-dominantly Western, white-man’s religion at the turn of this century, Christianity has become a global religion for the first time in history, proclaiming the gospel in nearly all the nations of the world. The unprecedented fulfillment in our time of this and other signs to be examined in the following two chapters, gives us reason to believe that Christ’s Return is not only certain but also “near, at the very gates” (Matt 24:33).

So the certainty of the Advent Hope rests not on human insights or wishes for a better tomorrow. It rests instead on the following facts: the clear and central teaching of Scripture; the decisive victory over sin and Satan already won by Christ at His first Advent; the ministry of the Holy Spirit in our lives which enables us to experience in the present “the first fruits” (Rom 8:23) of the great Advent harvest; the ministry of Christ in the heavenly sanctuary which is bringing to consummation His redemptive ministry; and the unprecedented fulfillment in our time of the Advent signs.

The certainty of the Advent Hope can offer comfort and courage to all of us who are called to live among the uncertainties and trouble of this present world. It can motivate us “to live sober, upright, and godly lives in this world, (while) awaiting our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ” (Titus 2:12, 13).

NOTES TO CHAPTER 9

1. All Scripture quotations are from the REvised Standard Version.
2. See Oscar Cullman, *Christ and Time* (Philadelphia, '964), p. 147. Also, A. L. Moore, *The Parousia in the New Testament* (Leiden, 1966), p. 64.
3. Rudolf Karl Bultmann, "NT and Mythology," in *Kerygma and Myth*, ed. Hans Werner Bartsch (London, 1961), vol. 1, p. 38.
4. Georgia Harkness, "Progress in Eschatology," *Christian Century* (January 14, 1953), p. 45.
5. For an analysis of Hal Lindsey's end-time scenario, see Samuele Bacchiocchi's *Hal Lindsey's Prophetic Jigsaw Puzzle: Five Predictions That Failed!* (Berrien Springs, Michigan, 1985).
6. Oscar Cullman, *Salvation in History*, trans. S. G. Sowers (New York, 1967), p. 84.
7. Dale Moody rightly points out that Christ's "present appearance in heaven fills with meaning the time between the two appearances in history. There is no vacuum." *The Hope of Glory* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1964), p. 226.

Chapter 10

THE IMMINENCE OF THE ADVENT HOPE

Is it possible for Christians at the threshold of the twenty-first century to still rationally believe and live in the expectation of Christ's imminent Return? Have not many Christians throughout the centuries believed and proclaimed that "Tis almost time for the Lord to come," and yet Christ has not returned?

Some Christians view the apparent "delay" of the Parousia as a legitimate reason for either neglecting or rejecting altogether the belief in the Second Coming of Christ to this earth . To abandon such a belief, however, means, not only to reject one of the clearest and most fundamental Biblical teaching, but also to empty our present life of meaning, motivation and hope. Faith in Jesus without the expectation of His Coming is like a flight of stairs leading nowhere, or like becoming engaged without ever hoping to get married.

Shakespear's words "journeys end in lovers meeting," applies not only to romantic love but also to the essence of our Christian hope. It is the climactic meeting with Christ at His Coming, that will mark the end of our pilgrimage and the beginning of a new and more intimate relationship with the Lord and with fellow believers (1 John 3:2).

The solution to the apparent "delay" of Christ's Return must be found not in abandoning such a fundamental Biblical teaching, but rather in re-examining more closely what the Scripture really teaches regarding the signs of the Second Advent. ¹

PRESENT RELEVANCE OF ADVENT SIGNS

Aware of the human tendency to postpone to tomorrow the preparation that ought to be done today, Christ gave generic precursory signs such as messianic pretenders, earthquakes, famines, political conflicts, Gospel proclamation. We noted in chapter seven that these signs have found a degree of fulfillment in every age, because they were intended to nourish the hope and strengthen the faith of believers in every age. Their function has been to help believers throughout history to face trials and suffering with the assurance that “the strife will not be long; this day the noise of battle, the next the victor’s song.”

Should Christians today look for a unique fulfillment of the End-time signs given by Christ in His Olivet Discourse? Have not the signs of messianic pretenders, earthquakes, famines, pestilences, military conflicts, and Gospel proclamation been witnesses to some degree in every generation? Their past fulfillment does not negate their present relevance and witness to Christ’s imminent Return. The reasons are at least two.

Progression Toward Consummation. A first reason is that Scripture views history as progressing toward its consummation at the day of Christ’s Coming. This means that every passing day brings us closer to the Day of Christ’s Return. If Paul could see in the fulfillment of the Advent signs of His time that “salvation is nearer to us than when we first believed; the night is far gone, the day is at hand” (Rom 13::11-12), how much more reasons have we, nineteen centuries later, to see in the fulfillment of the Advent signs, indications that the day of Christ’s Coming is nearer than it has ever been.

Intensification. A second reason for looking for a contemporary fulfillment of the Advent signs is that Scripture teaches us that the conflict between satanic and divine forces will intensify as the End draws near. The proclamation of the Gospel will reach the whole world (Matt 24:14); wickedness and apostacy will increase (Matt 24:12; 2 Thess 2:7); wars and disasters will intensify, as indicated by Christ’s qualification of these as being “but the beginning of the sufferings” (Matt 24:8; Mark 13:8). The latter phrase presupposes that there will be more and worse conflicts to come. These will cause such a “great tribulation” that, Jesus said, “if those days had not been shortened, no human being would be saved” (Matt 24:22; cf. Mark 13:20).

The predicted intensification of the Advent signs is finding an unprecedented fulfillment in our time. To appreciate this fact we shall

briefly consider the contemporary fulfillment of three specific kinds of Advent signs given by Christ in His Olivet Discourse: (1) The Sign of Divine Grace, (2) The Signs of Opposition to God, (3) The Signs of Divine Judgement.

THE SIGN OF DIVINE GRACE

Global Evangelization. Among all the signs of the End given by Christ in His Olivet Discourse the preaching of the Gospel throughout the world, stands out as the only sign temporally connected to the End. While with regard to the manifestation of antichrists, wars and calamities it is said, “but the end is not yet” (Matt 24:6), concerning the preaching of the Gospel “throughout the world, as a testimony to all nations,” it is clearly stated: “and then the end will come” (Matt 24:14). This sign of world evangelization is generally ignored by authors like Hal Lindsey, because it does not provide a clear basis for sensational prognostications. Yet it is the only sign that Christ links explicitly to the End.

The Meaning of the Great Commission. To appreciate the contemporary fulfillment of this sign, it is important to understand the meaning of Christ’s commission. The phrase “as a testimony to all nations” suggests that Christ meant not a global conversion of every single person, but a global witness in every nation. Paul understands this passage in this way when he says: “From Jerusalem as far round as Illyricum I have fully preached the Gospel” (Rom 15:19, emphasis supplied).

The Apostle felt that he had fully evangelized the Eastern wing of the Roman Empire, not because he had witnessed to every single person, nor because most of the population had become Christian, but because he had established Christian outposts in every province from where the light of the Gospel was beamed to the entire region. The actual number of Christians, according to scholarly estimates, was less than 1% of the population.

Global Christianity Today. A look at the Christian expansion during the past nineteen centuries, clearly indicates that today for the first time the Gospel is being proclaimed to practically “every nation and tribe and tongue and people” (Rev 14:6). According to the World Christian Encyclopedia, a scholarly research published by Oxford University Press (1982), Christianity has grown from 1 million members by A.D. 100 in a population of 181 million (representing 0.6% of mankind), to 50 million by A.D. 1000 in a population of 269 million (18% of mankind), and to 1,433 million by 1980 in a population of 4,374 million (32.8% of mankind).² According to the same encyclopedia, the percentage of the evangelized population of the

world,—that is people who have become aware of Christianity, Christ and the Gospel,—was 28% by the year 100, 25% by the year 1000, 50% by 1900, 68% by 1980 and is projected to reach 80-90% by the year 2000. ³

Internationalization. More impressive than the actual numerical growth of Christianity during the past twenty centuries, is its internationalization during our century. Jesus had predicted that “this gospel of the kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world, as a testimony to all nations” (Matt 24:14), yet by 1900 both Christianity in general and Seventh-day Adventism in particular, were still a predominantly Western religion.

At the turn of the century, 85% of the Christians (470 million) lived in the Western World and only 15% (87 million) lived in the Third World. ⁴ Similarly 93% of the Seventy-day Adventist membership (72,156) lived in North America and Europe, whereas only 7% of its members (5,396) lived in the rest of the world. ⁵

A radical change has occurred during the twentieth century, as both Christianity and Adventism have become global. By 1980 only 32.8% of Christians in general and 21% of Adventists lived in the Western World. ⁶ This means that during our century for the first time Christianity has been transformed from a Western, white man’s religion, to an international, multi-racial religion.

Bible Translations and Distribution. The internationalization of Christianity is reflected in the translations and distribution of the Bible during this century. From 537 languages by 1900, the Bible has become available, in whole or in part, in 1,830 languages by 1985, representing 98% of the world population. Similarly, the annual distribution of the Scriptures has risen from 5.4 million Bibles in 1900 to almost half a billion Bibles or portions of it by 1985. ⁷

Variety of Resources. In addition to the availability of Scriptures in over 1800 languages, Christianity possesses today an unprecedented quantity and variety of resources such as service agencies, educational and medical institutions, national and foreign workers, radio and television broadcasting, and impressive financial means. Today for the first time few powerful short-wave radio stations are capable of beaming the Gospel message to practically every country around the globe. These unparalleled human and technical resources, used under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, make the task of evangelizing the world a real possibility in our times. This fact gives us reason to believe that Christ’s Return “is near, at the very gates” (Matt 24:33).

SIGNS OF OPPOSITION TO GOD

The second kind of End-time signs given by Christ in His Olivet Discourse may be called “signs of opposition to God” because they characterize the intensification of human rebellion against God before Christ’s Return. For the sake of brevity we shall consider only three of these signs, namely: (1) Messianic Pretenders, (2) The Antichrist, (3) Increased Wickedness.

1. Messianic Pretenders

“**False Christs.**” Twice in His Olivet Discourse Christ warns against the appearance of “false Christs and false prophets” (Matt 24:4-5, 23-24; Mark 13:5-6, 21-22). The phrase “false Christs” can be translated as “false Messiahs” since “Christ” (Christos) is the Greek rendering of the Hebrew “Mashiah” (“Messiah”).

Chris’s warning goes beyond the contemporary appearance of many self-styled messiahs, because He speaks of them not only in the context of the destruction of Jerusalem (Matt 24:15-22), but also in connection of His Second Advent (v. 27). The description of “the coming of the Son of man” as a shining lightning (v. 27) is preceded immediately by the warning about “false Christs and false prophets” (Matt 24:24-26). This means that the appearance of messianic pretenders will occur up to the Return of Christ. Elsewhere the Scripture predicts an increased manifestation of anti-Christ forces before the End (2 Thess 2:3; Rev 13).

Contemporary Messiahs. The appearance today of self-appointed “prophets” and “messiahs” who pretend to offer new ways of salvation to their followers, is, as Christianity Today calls it, “a reality that has staggered our imagination.”⁸

To counteract the influence of “messianic” leaders such as Sun Myung Moon, founder of the Unification Church, Moses David, founder of the Children of God, Paul Wieveille, founder of The Way, Moharish Mahesh Yogi, founder of The Age of Enlightenment, Ron Hubbard, founder of The Scientologists, numerous books have been written. Among the most famous are *The Cult Explosion* by Dave Hunt, *The Lure of the Cults* by Ronald Enroth, *Cult Reference Bible* by Walter Martin, and *Battle for the Mind* by William Sargent. The cult of false messiahs is equally pervasive, though under different names and forms, in various parts of the world.⁹

Impersonal “Messiahs.” Christ’s prediction about the appearance of “false Christs and false prophets is finding a more subtle and pervasive fulfillment today through the widespread of “impersonal messiahs” such as

science, technology, and secularistic ideologies as communists, humanism and materialism. These ideologies offer to many the kind of messianic hope for a better tomorrow that in the days of Jesus was derived from the expected coming of a personal Deliverer.

In the Soviet Union Christians have fallen from 83% of the population in 1900 to 36% today.¹⁰ For many communists, Marx or Lenin plays a messianic role. In North America and Western Europe almost three million Christians every year give up their Christian faith, accepting instead secularistic and humanistic ideologies as their hope for a better tomorrow.¹¹

2. The Antichrist

John and the Antichrist. The sign of “false Christs” has found its fulfillment not only in the appearance of messianic pretenders but also in the persons of false teachers. John makes this connection clear when he speaks of “the antichrists,” that is, false teachers who denied the incarnation of Christ (1 John 4:2-3; 2:18, 22; 2 John 7). What believers had heard about the coming of “false Christs and false prophets,” John saw as being fulfilled in the person of false teachers who denied that “Jesus Christ has come in the flesh” (1 John 4:2).

Contemporary Antichrists. The “spirit of the antichrist” which was “in the world already” (1 John 4:3) in John’s time, has had its tentacles in every generation and is especially pervasive today. Its manifestation can be seen in the rationalistic, liberal movements which deny not only the reality of the incarnation but also other fundamental Biblical beliefs such as a fiat creation, the atonement, the resurrection of Jesus, the occurrence of miracles, and the Second Advent.

Belief in the bodily resurrection of Christ is explained by some scholars as the result of hallucinatory visions of the risen Christ.¹² A symposium written by seven English scholars, *The Myth of God Incarnate*, explains away the incarnation as a myth created by Samaritan converts. Other theologians interpret the Second Advent as a mythical expression of a timeless truth.

The impact of these End-time “antichrists” can be seen not only in the increasing disbelief and defection from Christianity in the Western world, but also in the erosion of Christian moral values. The pervasiveness in our time of the “spirit of the antichrist,” makes the words of John ring true especially today: “Children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come; therefore we know that it is the last hour” (1 John 2:18).

3. The Apostasy

Pre-Advent Apostasy. Closely related to the End-time appearance of messianic pretenders and false teachers (antichrists) is the sign of apostasy. In His Olivet Discourse Christ connects apostasy (“many will fall away”—Matt 24:10) with the appearance of “false prophets” (Matt 24:11-12), obviously because often the former is caused by the latter.

Paul emphasizes the significance of the pre-Advent apostasy, when he warns the Thessalonians against the deceptive teaching that Christ had already returned (2 Thess 2:2). He explains to them that Christ “will not come, unless the rebellion comes first” (2 Thess 2:3). “The rebellion” is a translation of the Greek “**he apostasia,**” from which derives our English word “apostasy.”

Paul recognized that the End-time apostasy predicted by Christ was “already at work” (2 Thess 2:7) at his time, but he makes it abundantly clear that “the apostasy,” that is, the well-known pre-Advent rebellion had not yet taken place. He points to this fact to show to the Tesselonians that Christ could not have possibly already returned, because before (“first—2 Thess 2:3) His Return, there is to come a final, climactic apostasy.

Apostasy Today. Is the final, pre-Advent apostasy taking place in Christendom today? The answer is abundantly clear when one looks at twentieth-century Christianity. While on the one hand Christianity has experienced during this century massive gains in the third world, thus becoming for the first time a global religion, on the other hand, it has suffered massive losses in the Western and Communist worlds. Secularism, humanism and communism have become so pervasive in Europe, that some analysts speak of “the post-Christian era.”

The World Christian Encyclopedia sadly acknowledges that “no-one in 1900 expected the massive defections from Christianity that subsequently took place in Western Europe due to secularism, in Russia and later in Eastern Europe due to communism, and in the AMericans due to materialism.”¹³ These various systems “are today increasing at the extraordinary rate of 8.5 million new converts each year” and the sad reality is that “a large percentage of their members are the children, grandchildren or great-grandchildren who in their lifetimes were practising Christians.”¹⁴ This unprecedented apostasy, which is occurring in the very heartlands of historic Christianity, could well be the final or at least the prelude to the final pre-Advent apostasy predicted by Christ and Paul.

4. Increased Wickedness

Like Noah's and Lot's Days. Closely related and causally connected to the final apostasy is the sign of increased social wickedness prior to Christ's Return: "Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of many will grow cold" (Matt 24:12, NIV). To characterize the pre-Advent social wickedness, Christ refers to the moral and sexual depravity of two periods of Old Testament history, namely, "the days of Noah" and "the days of Lot" (Matt 24:37-39; Luke 17:26-30).

The importance of this pre-Advent sign was recognized by Paul who warns against the godlessness of the last days, saying: "There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God—having a form of godliness but denying its power" (2 Tim 3::1-5, NIV).

This shocking prediction of the End-time social wickedness reads like an accurate description of our time. Paul saw that lawlessness was "already at work" (2 Thess 2:7) in his own time, but he foresaw an intensification of it before Christ's Return. This would result in a climactic pre-Advent apostasy and manifestation of "the man of lawlessness" (2 Thess 2:3). To appreciate the timeliness of this Advent sign, we shall briefly look at the surge in world crime and at the sexual revolution.

Surge in World Crime. Crime today is skyrocketing out of control throughout the world. In a report filed by correspondents from several world capitals, U.S. News & World Report writes: "Just as in the United States, crime is on the rise in almost every country around the world... From London to Moscow to Johannesburg, crime is fast becoming a major menace that is changing the way in which many people live."¹⁵

In America violent crimes have quadrupled since 1960. To bring home the intensity of violent crime in America, the same magazine gives the following "Clock Ticks" statistics for 1980: "A murder occurs every 23 minutes; a forcible rape occurs every 6 minutes; a robbery occurs every 58 seconds; an aggravated assault occurs every 48 seconds; a motor vehicle is stolen every 28 seconds; a burglary occurs every 8 seconds."

The escalation of various forms of crime is causing a paralyzing fear in many parts of the world. As Christ predicted, many today are "fainting with fear and with foreboding of what is coming on the world" (Luke 21:16).¹⁶

Sexual Revolution. Christ pointed to the sexual depravity of the days of Noah and Lot to characterize the age preceding His Return. The sexual revolution of our time offers an unprecedented fulfillment of this Advent sign. Today sex is idolized and marketed through films, television, pop songs, pornographic magazines, and advertisements. The “sexual appeal” has become an important factor influencing the production and sale of goods.

The total impact of the sexual revolution is hard to estimate. Immoral connotation of illicit sexual acts are being eliminated through the introduction of “softer” terms. Fornication is now referred to as “pre-marital sex,” with the emphasis on the “pre” rather than on the marital. Adultery is now called “extramarital sex,” implying an additional experience, like an extraprofessional activity. Homosexuality has gradually been “softened” from serious perversion through deviation, to “gay” variation.

Some of the natural consequences of the sexual revolution are: the shocking rise of the divorce rate in many parts of the world; marriage aberrations like “open marriages” or mate swapping; sexual abuse of children which according to some authorities is becoming epidemic; abortion of an appalling number of unborn babies; widespread homosexuality and lesbianism; an epidemic of venereal diseases and of the recently surfaced AIDS.

The Advent signs of opposition to God predicted by Christ are finding an unprecedented fulfillment in our time. Personal and impersonal messiahs have arisen deceiving millions around the world. The predicted Antichrist is present today in the persons of influential religious teachers who deny the basic tenets of Christianity. The final apostasy predicted by Christ and Paul is manifest in the massive defections from Christianity in the Western world. The predicted “increase in wickedness” is evident especially in the alarming surge of violent crimes and in the sexual obsession and perversion of our society. This frightening intensification of human rebellion against God points to the impending judgement which Christ will execute upon evildoers at His coming.

SIGNS OF DIVINE JUDGMENT

The third kind of End-time signs given by Christ in His Olivet Discourse may be called, “signs of divine judgements”, because of their nature and function. Specifically Jesus said: “And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars; see that you are not alarmed; for this must take place, but the

end is no yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places: for this is but the beginning of the suffering” (Matt 24:6-8 cf. Mark 13:7-8). Luke adds “pestilences” to the listing of calamities (Luke 21:11). Before giving specific attention to the fulfillment of these signs in our time, it is important to briefly define the overall Biblical significance of calamities.

A Call to Repentance. The Scripture views calamities such as war, earthquakes, famines, and pestilences, as being a manifestation of divine judgment upon human wickedness (Is 13-27; 63:1-6; Jer 29:17-23 Rev 16). Their purpose is, first of all, to summon people to repent (Joel 15,14).

Jesus explained that tragedies, like the collapse of Siloam’s tower that killed eighteen persons, was to bring home the important lesson that “unless you repent you will all likewise perish” (Luke 13:5).

Disasters have a sobering effect upon the human mind. When countless lives and property are destroyed by earthquakes, drought, tornadoes, and epidemic diseases, many people will turn to God either in curse or prayer. It is reported that in a high school in Palm Springs (California) there was a sign which read: “In the event of an earthquake, the Supreme Court ruling against prayers in school will be temporarily suspended.”

It was an earthquake that caused the jailer at Philippi to exclaim: “Men, what must I do to be saved?” (Acts 16:30). It was a famine that sent King Ahab searching for the prophet Elijah (1 King 18:10). It was a plague that brought Pharaoh to his knees, confessing before Moses: “I have sinned against the Lord, your God and against you” (Ex 10:16). It is by means of calamities that God is summoning mankind to repent before it is too late (Rev 16:8-11).

Announcement of the Final Judgment. A second noteworthy function of calamities is to serve as harbingers of the final judgement. Jesus spoke of wars, earthquakes, famines, and pestilences as representing “but the beginning of the suffering” (Matt 24:8; Mark 13:8). This expression implies that calamities do not pinpoint but point to the approaching final judgement. They constitute a pledge that Christ will surely come to execute judgment upon human wickedness. “But the beginning” also presupposes that there will be more and worse disasters yet to come. These will cause such a “great tribulation” that, Jesus said, “if those days had not been shortened, no human being would be saved” (Matt 24:22; cf. Mark 13:20).

In the light of the above observations brief consideration will now be given to four specific signs of divine judgment given by Christ: (1) Wars and rumors of wars, (2) Disasters, (3) Famines, (4) Pestilences.

1. Wars and Rumors of War

Intensification of Warfare. The first sign of divine judgment given by Christ is the occurrence of wars: “And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars; see that you are not alarmed; for this must take place, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, ...all this is but the beginning of the suffering” (Matt 24:6-8; cf. Mark 13:7-8).

The End-time intensification of warfare alluded here by Christ, is explained more fully in other prophetic writings. Daniel, for example, sees a succession of kingdoms in which warfare intensity in extent, brutality and destruction (Dan 2 and 7). John the Revelator portrays dramatically the intensification of warfare in the vision of the Four Horsemen (Rev. 6:1-8) and of the sixth plague. In the latter “demonic spirits” are presented as going “abroad to the kings of the whole world, to assemble them for the battle on the great day of God the Almighty” (Rev 16:14).

Twenty-Century Wars. Wars have plagued mankind throughout its history. They represented the most tangible evidence of the demonic influence upon this present world order. The recognition of this obvious fact must not obscure the equally self-evident fact that never before our century have wars been so global and destructive.

It is estimated that World War I, which engaged almost thirty nation, took the lives of 9,000,000 military personnel and 5,000,000 civilians.¹⁷ Hardly twenty years passed after the end of World War I before World War II broke out, which engaged over 50 countries and caused the death of over 55 million civilians and military persons.¹⁸ The globality and destructiveness of the two world wars, which have caused more casualties and suffering than all the previous wars combined, represent an unparalleled fulfillment of the predicted intensification of warfare before Christ’s Coming.

The prospect of another worldwide conflict remains a real possibility. First, because World War II has not eradicated war. Since the end of World War II there have been some 140 conflicts in which over ten million people have been killed.¹⁹ Second, because the race to improve the delivery system and the destructiveness of nuclear weapons goes on unabated. “Splitting the atom,” a pundit said, “was not such a wise crack after all!”

Most analysts predict that the greatest threat to a nuclear war could come not from a direct clash between the superpowers, but rather from smaller developing countries which are operating nuclear reactors. A country under stress could consider deploying nuclear weapons to black-

mail richer nations into transferring food and other vital resources to its starving millions. Senator Mark Hatfield has warned that the threat of hunger “is more explosive than all the atomic weaponry possessed by the big powers. Desperate people do desperate things, and remember that nuclear fission is now in the hands of even the developing nations.”²⁰

The increasing social and political tensions, coupled with the unchecked arm race, could easily drag mankind into another unwanted worldwide conflict which could be the apocalyptic battle of Armageddon or, at least, the prelude to it.

2. Natural and Man-Made Disasters

Together with wars, Jesus mentioned, as signs of the End, the occurrence of disasters, such as earthquakes, famines and pestilences: “There will be great earthquakes, and in various places famines and pestilences” (Luke 21:11; cf. Matt 24:7; Mark 13:8). These disasters figure prominently among the Advent signs because they represent a solemn divine warning and appeal to evildoers to repent and be saved before the final judgment. Jesus spoke of these as being “but the beginning of the sufferings” (Matt 24:8; Mark 13:8), thus implying that they will intensify and cause the “great tribulation” that will be shortened by Christ’s Return (Matt 24:21-22).

Natural Disasters Today. While disasters have often occurred in the course of history, they appear to have significantly increased in recent years. Science news, for example, notes “a worldwide trend in increased temblors.”²¹ Australian seismologist G. A. Eiby, in his recent book *Earthquakes* (1980) reports 206 earthquakes with magnitude of 8.0 or more (like 1906, San Francisco) for the period 1903 to 1976 and 131 historical earthquakes for the period 1500 to 1902.²² In view of the lack of instrumental records prior to 1903, one cannot rightly conclude that the incidence of major earthquakes has increased four hundred fold in our century. On the other hand it is hard to discount what appears to be a noticeable increase in various forms of disasters.

Recent disasters have caused some to wonder, as expressed by the headline of U.S. News & World Report, “Is Mother Nature Going Berserk? . . . Blizzards hitting much of the United States and Europe in the most severe winter of the century . . . Earthquakes rocking New England and Arkansas . . . Mountains rumbling in the Northwest... Sinkholes swallowing building in Florida. Such cataclysms of earth and weather, coming one on the top of another, are raising the question of whether Mother Nature has gone berserk—and whether the world is tilting toward profound changes of climate and structure that will intensify over coming years.”²³

Man-made Disasters. Not only natural disasters are intensifying but also those caused by human irresponsible pollution and depletion of natural resources. The Club of Rome, one of the most distinguished watchdog organizations of the present crises, opens its second report entitled *Mankind at the Turning Point*, acknowledging: “Suddenly—virtually overnight when measured on a historical scale—mankind finds itself confronted by a multitude of unprecedented crisis: The population crisis, the environmental crisis, the world food crisis, the energy crisis, the raw material crisis, to name a few. New crisis appear while old ones linger on.”²⁴

Famines Today. A crisis which has received world attention recently, is that of widespread starvation in many developing countries. Famines have often occurred in the past, but never before on our present scale. Never before has mankind had one billion persons suffering from starvation or malnutrition.²⁵ The prospects for the future are hardly brighter. A million-dollar study, commissioned by President Carter in 1980 and published under the title “Global 2000 Report to the President,” predicts that by the end of this century the number of starving people will more than double.²⁶

A major contributory factor to the unprecedented hunger crisis is the population explosion of this past century. It took until 1830 for the world population to reach the first billion. Then only a hundred years (1930) to reach the second billion. Thirty years (1960) to reach the third billion. Fifteen years (1975) to reach the fourth billion. It is estimated that by the year 2000 the world population will have climbed to about seven billion. The sad reality is that much of this growth will occur in developing countries where a food crisis already exists.

For the coming generation the symbol of death may well be not war but what Richard Selzer calls “strangulation in the open air”—a euphemism for starvation.²⁷ A head nurse who cares for starving children in a Calcutta hospital has been quoted as saying: “They die so gracefully.” Nevertheless they die. The starvation of a few individuals is a sad statistic, but the starvation of hundreds of millions is an unprecedented world tragedy and a clear sign that the Return of Christ is both certain and imminent.

Epidemic Diseases. Causally interrelated to famines is the Advent sign of “pestilences” (Luke 21:11), that is, infectious or contagious diseases that reach epidemic proportions. Despite the medical triumphs of our time, such as the discovery of antibiotics and vaccines, pestilences not only persists but have reached epidemic proportions in many parts of the world.

Most Westerners ignore the frightening prevalence and devastation caused by tropical diseases in developing countries. According to the United Nations, intestinal roundworm (ascariasis) victimized 650 million people. Hookworms which feed on the small intestine (ancylostomiasis) afflicts 450 million people. Dysentery caused by amoeba (amoebiasis) victimizes 350 million persons and kills at least six million children annually. ²⁸ In addition to these intestinal parasitic diseases, which in some developing countries have a devastating affect on the living conditions of 80 to 90 percent of the population, there are the six killers, namely, measles, tuberculosis, whooping cough, polio, tetanus and diphtheria, which kill 5 million children a year and disable another 5 million. ²⁹

In industrialized nations the two leading killers are cardiovascular disorders and cancer. According to the United Nations approximately five million people die annually from cancer and twice as many from cardiovascular diseases. ³⁰ In addition many countries are currently experiencing an epidemic of sexually related diseases such as herpes, gonorrhea, and AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome). The latter is causing great panic for two reasons. First, because it is deadly, and second, because it is doubling every year.

CONCLUSION

The End-time signs given by Christ in His Olivet Discourse and clarified by other New Testament writers, are finding an unprecedented fulfillment in our times. The sign of divine grace manifested in world evangelization, is being fulfilled in a unique way today, as the Gospel is being proclaimed for the first time to practically all the nations of the world. The signs of opposition to God are especially evident today in the appearance of personal and impersonal messiahs which are deceiving millions around the world, in the massive defection from Christianity in the Western World and in the alarming increase of violent crimes and sexual perversion.

The signs of divine judgment are being fulfilled in a special way in our time as mankind has experienced the most destructive wars and weapons of history, an intensification of natural and man-made disasters, an unprecedented hunger crisis, and startling increase in the incidence and prevalence of various diseases. The unique fulfillment today of all the Advent signs given by Christ tell us that God is calling upon unbelievers to repent and upon believers to live holy and godly lives while announcing to the world the good news of a soon-coming Saviour.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 10

1. Different aspects of the time elements of the Second Advent are examined at length by the author in chapters 5 to 10 of *The Advent Hope for Human Hopelessness*.

2. David B. Barrett, ed., *World Christian Encyclopedia. A Comparative Study of Churches and Religions in the Modern World A.D. 1900-2000* (Oxford University Press, 1982), pp. 3-5.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 18; see Global Table 10.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 6.

5. *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* (August 18, 1904), p. 15.

6. *World Christian Encyclopedia*, p. 6; 120th Annual Statistical Report, 1982, compiled by the Office of Archives and Statistics of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, p. 1.

7. *World Christian Encyclopedia*, p. 13; see also Global Tables 12 and 31.

8. Rodney Clapp, "Cults: A Reality That Ha Staggered Our Imaginations," *Christianity Today* (January 1, 1982): 50.

9. See for example, "New Cults," *World Press Review* (March 1981): 15.

10. *World Christian Encyclopedia*, p. 4.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 7

12. See for example, Gordon D. Kaufman, *Systematic Theology: A Historical Perspective* (New York, 1968), pp. 411-434.

13. *World Christian Encyclopedia*, p. 3.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 5.

15. "Abroad, Too, Fear Grips the Cities," *U.S. News and World Report* (February 23, 1981): 65.

16. "Our Loosing Battle Against Crime," *U.S. News and World Report* (October 12, 1981): 40.

17. J. David Singer and Melvin Small, *The Wages of War: 1816-1965. A Statistical Handbook* (New York, 1972), p. 65.

18. Theodore Ropp, "World War II," *World Book Encyclopedia* (Chicago, 1975), p. 380.
19. Ernest W. Lefever and E. Stephen Hunt, *The Apocalypse Premise* (Washington, D. C., 1982), pp. X and 391.
20. Mark Hatfield, "World Hunger," *World Vision* (February, 1975): 5.
21. "Significant U.S. Quakes Double in 1980," *Science News* (May 12, 1981): 25.
22. A. Eiby, *Earthquakes* (New York, 1980), pp. 187-193.
23. "Is Mother Nature Going Beserk?" *U.S. News and World Report* (February 22, 1982): 66.
24. Mihajlo D. Mesarovic and Eduard Pestel, *Mankind at the Turning Point. The Second Report of the Club of Rome* (New York, 1974), p. 1.
25. "Facts on Food," in *Development Forum* (November, 1974), cited in Ronald J. Sidner, *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger* (Downers Grove, Illinois 1977), p. 16.
26. "Global Report to the President," cited in "Future Flood," *Reports* (April, 1982): 16.
27. Richard Selzer, *Strangulation in the Open Air*, Harper (June, 1974): 16.
28. "World Society 1982," *UN Chronicle* (November, 1982): 39.
29. "1983 State of the World's Children. A Report from UNICEF," *UN Chronicle* (February, 1983): 57.
30. "World Society 1982," *UN Chronicle* (November, 1982): 41.

Chapter 11

LIVING

THE ADVENT HOPE

What does it mean to live in the expectancy of a soon-Coming Saviour? How should the Advent Hope affect our life, work, values, decisions, in short, our total outlook toward life? The answer to these questions is vital because it determines the relevance for our life today of the belief in Christ's imminent Return.

The chapter examines the practical implications of the Advent Hope by considering five specific ways in which this Hope should affect our life here and now.

1. LIVING WITH A FORWARD LOOK

The Forward Look. To live in the expectancy of Christ's imminent Return means first of all to live with a forward look. Some people look longingly backward to some past Golden Age. Others look with satisfaction at their present attainments or condition.

By contrast, the Christian lives looking forward to the future New Age to be inaugurated at the Second Advent. Peter urges this forward look, saying: Set your hope fully upon the grace that is coming to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ (1 Peter 1:13).

Paul eloquently expresses this forward look, saying: Brethren, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but one thing I do, forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus (Phil 3:13-14).

It is noteworthy that the Apostle finds the motivation for living and serving, not in his past life, part of which he spent ignorantly persecuting Christians, not in his present attainment of perfection (Not that I...am already

perfect v. 12), but in the future goal of fellowship with Christ and fellow believers. The Apostle urges all mature Christians to have the same forward look: Let those of us who are mature be thus minded (Phil 3:15).

Pilgrims s Outlook. To live with a forward look means to view our present life as a pilgrimage, a journey to a better land. It means to live like Abraham, looking forward to the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God (Heb 11:10).

Do we view ourselves as pilgrims or as permanent residents of this earth? Someone has said that twenieth-century Christians are the best-disguised set of pilgrims this world has ever seen. Most Christians hardly give the impression that they are just passing through, when they are working intensely, sometimes even at a second or third job, in order to have, like the Joneses, two cars in the garage and two chicken in the pot.

This does not mean that we must have a world-denying attitude and live like hermits. Rather it means that we enjoy the goods and blessings that God gives us in this present world, without loosing sight of the fact that these are not an end in themselves, but a foretaste, an anticipation of the greater blessings to be enjoyed in the world to come. It means that we view all our achievements and our possessions such as homes, cars, goadgets, as transitory. They are things God gives us in this present life to help us appreciate the greater realities that awaits us in the life to come.

2. LIVING BY THE SPIRIT

The Enabling of the Holy Spirit. To live in the expectancy of Christ s soon Return means especially to live by the enabling power of the Holy Spirit. It is only by the enabling power of the Holy Spirit that we can live sober, upright, and godly lives (Titus 2:12). Christ related the parable of the Ten Virgins (Matt 25:1-3) to emphasize the important role the Holy Spirit is to play in the life of those who await His Return. The foolish virgins were unprepared to meet Christ, the Bridegroom, at His Coming, because they failed to seek constantly the enabling power of the Holy Spirit.

There are many today who like the foolish virgins, try to solve their behavioral, emotional, moral, or marital problems solely by seeking professional advice from counselors, books or seminars. Advice is needed but no amount of advice can help those whose will power has been weakened. These is advice printed in black and white on every pack of cigarettes and yet about forty million Americans find themselves unable to break the smoking habit. The same holds true with the other bad habits such as impatience, temper,

unkindness, unfaithfulness. What is needed to overcome bad habits is not solely good advice but especially the enabling power of the Holy Spirit that enlightens our minds and strengthens our will so that we can perceive and do the will of God (Eph 3:16).

The Fruits of the Spirit. As Christians who live in the shadow of the Second Advent we need to claim daily the power of the Spirit which enables us to bear the fruits of the Spirit, namely, love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control (Gal 5:22). These fruits of the Spirit are what Paul calls the first fruits (Rom 8:23), that is, a foretaste of the greater love, joy, peace... we will experience at the Advent harvest.

When we bear the fruits of the Spirit we are in a sense living in the expectancy of Christ's Return by becoming more and more like One we are expecting: We all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being changed into his likeness from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit (2 Cor 3:18).

3. LIVING A BALANCED LIFE

Balanced Life. To live a Christ-like life by the power of the Holy Spirit while awaiting His imminent Return, means to live a balanced life. Peter mentions certain specific characteristics of a balanced lifestyle: The end of all things is at hand; therefore keep sane and sober for your prayers. Above all hold unfailing love for one another, since love covers a multitude of sin (1 Pet 4:7).

Preserve your Sanity. The first characteristic of the lifestyle of a person who believes that the end of all things is at hand is sanity: keep sane, that is to say, preserve your sanity. Sanity is the capacity to see things in their proper perspective, to distinguish between right and wrong; to avoid unreasonable fanaticism and unrealizing indifference. As Advent believers we need in a special way to preserve our sanity because we are constantly exposed to the dual danger of overexcitement and indifference.

Overexcitement. Some Christians, like the Thessalonians of Paul's day, became so shaken in mind (and) excited (2 Thess 2:2) at the thought of Christ's imminent Return, that they lose their sanity by championing fanatical teachings, making sensational predictions regarding the time and the manner of the End, and by promoting survival programs and products. They view this world as a sinking ship and they see no value in working to improve social conditions, since Christ at His Coming will destroy this sinful world-order.

Indifference. Other Christians, by far the vast majority, lose their sanity by becoming indifferent toward Christ's Coming. They chose to make this present world not a waiting room to the world to come, but a living room in which to live as though Christ may never come.

Sanity is needed especially today to be able to live sober, upright and godly lives (Titus 2:12) in this at-times-insane world where perversion, violence, immorality, materialism and secularism prevails.

Preserve your Sobriety. The second characteristic of the lifestyle of an Advent believer, mentioned by Peter, is sobriety: Be sober (1 Peter 4:7), that is to say, preserve your sobriety. The Greek verb used by Peter (nephein) originally meant to be sober in contradistinction to being drunk. The verb came to mean to act soberly, temperately, sensibly.

Sobriety and temperance is most important for Christians who look forward to becoming citizens of the Earth where every person will live soberly and temperately (Rev 21:8, 27). Any person who chooses to live intemperately by smoking or drinking his or her health away, rather than quitting the habit by divine grace, can hardly be interested in becoming a citizen of the New Earth where no person with unclean habits will be admitted (Rev 21:27).

To live soberly and temperately in view of Christ's Return means not only to abstain from the use of intoxicants but also to distinguish between necessities and luxuries, wants and wishes, restraining our desires for the latter. It means to be willing to ask ourselves, when buying new clothes, a new car, a new house, or new furniture: Am I buying these to bolster my weak self-image? To keep up with the Joneses? Simply to keep up with fashion? Will this purchase encourage fellow Christians to live the kind of lifestyle Christ is calling us to live while awaiting His Return? Do I have a right to purchase anything my heart desires simply because I can afford it?

If our motive for the acquisition of goods is primarily to gratify extravagant wishes rather than meeting genuine needs, then we need to heed God's admonition, Be sober! If the size of our wardrobe is such that we have not worn many of the outfits for months or even years, then we need to heed God's admonition, Be sober! If we choose to live in a large house where half of the rooms are never used, then we need to heed God's admonition, Be sober!

Preserve your Prayer Life. The reason given by Peter for preserving sanity and sobriety is, for your prayers (1 Pet 4:7), that is to say, in order to pray as we ought.

It is not difficult to see the connection between sanity, sobriety and prayer life. A person who lives an unbalanced life, either by advocating fanatical ideas and programs, or by indulging in an intemperate life, obviously will either ignore his or her prayer life or will pray for the wrong things. The opposite is equally true. A person who maintains a healthy prayer life will be enabled by the Holy Spirit to preserve his sanity and sobriety in a society where indulgence, intemperance, and fanaticism prevail.

The importance of prayer in the life of those who live in the expectancy of Christ's Coming was underscored by the Saviour Himself in His Olivet Discourse. After warning about the danger of intemperance, Christ said: Watch at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that will take place, and to stand before the Son of man (Luke 21:36). It is noteworthy that Christ makes prayer the key to obtaining the strength to withstand external pressures and to be ready to stand before Him at His Coming. The reason why prayer is so essential is because it makes us more receptive and responsive to the influence of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

4. LIVING LOVINGLY

Unfailing Love. To live in the expectancy of Christ's Return means especially live lovingly. Peter emphasizes this characteristic saying: Above all hold unfailing your love for one another, since love covers a multitude of sins (1 Pet 4:8). Peter characterizes Christian love as unfailing. The Greek term (*ektenes*) has also the meaning of being zealous and outreaching. In other words genuine Christian love is zealous, never-failing, reaching to all the lovable and unlovable.

There is much talk about love today, but most of it is love of self rather than love of others. People often speak of how much they love their job, their car, their clothes, their sexual partner, the place where they live. What they actually love is the self-gratification these things offer them. This is self-centered love that often leads to indifference toward the needs of others. The result of this self-love is most evident today in the appalling number of starving people, violent crimes, abused children, battered wives, neglected elderly people. Jesus predicted these pre-Advent conditions when He said that most men's love will grow cold (Matt 24:12).

If Christian love was a key factor in the success of the early Christian's outreach to the Roman world, it is also a vital factor today to the success of our End-time mission to preach the Gospel to all the world (Matt 24:14). A businessman told me that the reason he and his family did not join a certain church was because in that church there was too-much law and too-little love.

5. LIVING INDUSTRIOUSLY

Use your Gifts. To live in the expectancy of Christ's Return means also to live industriously, by developing and using to the full every gift God has given us. In the parable of the pounds Christ commissions those who wait for His Return saying: Trade with these till I come (Luke 19:13). In fact the only servant who was condemned at the return of the master was the servant who chose to hide his talent by not using it (Matt 25:24-30; Luke 19:20-23).

To fulfill the Gospel commission we need to make full use of every gift each believer possesses. It may be a gift of speaking, of music, of understanding and counseling, or practical service, of money, or of possessions inherited. Whatever gifts each one of us possesses, we must regard them as endowments to be used to hasten to establishment of Christ's Kingdom.

Develop your Gifts. To use our gifts effectively requires that we develop them to their full potential. Some Christians reason that if Christ is coming soon, there is no point in making long-range plans for the future. They see no reasons to study hard for a long period of time to become a doctor, a nurse, a teacher, a preacher, an engineer, an architect, a musician, etc. They deem it unwise to invest financial and human resources to build modern schools, hospitals, churches; this is a shortsighted and unbiblical view.

Such reasoning ignores the fact that to live in readiness for the imminent Coming of Christ does not mean to resign ourselves to passive expectancy by abandoning any plan for self-improvement. Rather it means to work actively for the betterment of ourselves and of our society. Trade with these till I come (Luke 19:13), is Christ's commission to us who wait for His Return. Christ expects us to plan and work for the future without making our future plans the only dominant future to live for. We must live as if Christ would return today, and yet plan and work as if His Coming were still in the future. Keeping this tension in balance is essential for our life today.

Conclusion. A live Advent Hope greatly affects our motives, our values, our choices, in short, our total lifestyle. We have seen that living in the expectancy of Christ's imminent Return means, among other things, to live with a forward look, laboring in this world without losing sight of the world to come. It means living by the enabling power of the Holy Spirit, experiencing in this present life a foretaste of the blessings of the life to come. It means living balanced lives, by preserving our sanity, sobriety, and prayer life. It means to live lovingly, by showing unfailing forgiving love toward all. It means to live industriously, by developing and using all the gifts God has given us. In short, it means to renounce irreligion and worldly passions, and to live sober, upright and godly lives in this world, awaiting our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ. (Titus 2:12-13).