



**THE ADVENT HOPE
for
HUMAN HOPELESSNESS**

**A THEOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE MEANING
OF THE SECOND ADVENT FOR TODAY**

Samuele Bacchiocchi

FOREWORD

by

Dr. Richard Leshar

President, Andrews University

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FOREWORD

by
Dr. W. Richard Lesh
President, Andrews University

In an easy, popular style infected by his contagious enthusiasm, Dr. Samuele Bacchiocchi presents a wide-ranging study of the Second Advent. His study is based on the Scriptures, but he seeks to meet the needs of people today, and not just spin theological webs. The material is arranged in logical sequence with frequent section headings to facilitate the reading and comprehension.

The theme of hope is especially fitting for our uncertain and troubled times. Dr. Bacchiocchi stresses not so much the hopelessness of the human situation but has chosen rather to be positive, presenting the Hope that arises out of the Parousia and even out of the final judgment. These events are often viewed with alarm and foreboding, and it is refreshing to read them in hopeful terms.

If the topics examined were solely restricted to the Second Advent, the reader could be left with many unanswered questions. By including many closely related themes, Dr. Bacchiocchi has greatly reduced the possibility of reader's misunderstanding. One such theme is dealt with in Chapter 10, "The Signs of Divine Judgment." Many Christians have felt that the "signs" relate primarily to events now past and have lost their significance to the believers in the last quarter of the twentieth century. But Dr. Bacchiocchi provides clear examples indicating that the signs given by Jesus are relevant to today's world.

The subject of the investigative judgment is also addressed in a fresh approach which leaves the pillars in place.

The Hope of the Second Advent that Dr. Bacchiocchi presents is quite at variance with the views of dispensationalism. He recognizes this difference and gives his reasons for rejecting such views in Chapter 11.

In the chapters you are about to read is the message that can revive an Advent Hope grown dim, or bring to new heights of expectation a hope held high in Jesus and frequent communion with His word. May God Bless you with His Spirit as you take this journey of hope through *The Advent Hope for Human Hopelessness*.

A SPECIAL ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Private patrons of Biblical research are few and far between. “Blessed” is the scholar who finds a generous soul willing to support financially his or her research endeavors. Such blessing came to me in the most unexpected way.

The telephone rang one evening in my motel room in Norwalk, California, while I was preparing myself for the weekend presentations I was to deliver at the local Seventh-day Adventist Church. At the other end of the line was a most gracious lady whom I had never met before, Dr. Helen Lucille Popoway, a retired medical doctor. After explaining the effort she had made to reach me by phone, she told me how she learned about me by reading my books and the reports about my seminar on the *Recorder*, the Pacific Union SDA church paper. She went on explaining how impressed she felt to call me to find out if she could contribute to a project of mine.

The offer came as a providential answer to my wish to complete the research and writing of this book on the Blessed Hope of our soon-Coming Savior. When I explained this project to Dr. Popoway and my desire to have this study translated and published in Italian to benefit believers in my homeland, she enthusiastically offered to contribute to this project, in memory of her father, Pastor Max Popow, who lived, labored and died with a faith in the Second Advent of Christ.

Words are inadequate to express my deep gratitude to Dr. Popoway for her generous gift which is making possible the Italian translation and publication of this book. Her desire to help worthy causes is not only praiseworthy but also of great inspiration to me.

The life story of this lady is truly remarkable. She was born in 1922 in Manchuria, China, of Russian parents. Her father, Pastor Max Popow, a Russian-born Seventh-day Adventist minister, worked for 19 years among the white Russian people who had settled in China just prior the 1917 Russian Revolution. He directed the SDA mission work among the Russian people in China until 1939 when he came to the USA, bringing his family with him.

Under Pastor Popow's leadership, the SDA work among Russian people in China grew considerably. Two large church sanctuaries were built and many smaller church groups of Russian Adventists were organized. A Russian primary and high school were established, as well as a ministerial training school and a Publishing house which printed literature in the Russian language.

Dr. Popoway attended a Russian Y.M.C.A. High School in China, where she graduated in 1938, at the age of 16, with *summa cum laude*, receiving a gold medal. When her family moved to the USA in 1939, she enrolled at Pacific Union College for premedical studies. In the summer of 1943 she entered what is known today as Loma Linda University where she graduated in the summer of 1946, when she was not quite 24 years of age.

Following graduation, she completed two years of rotating internship (her choice), and later two years of anesthesiology residency at White Memorial Medical Center. Subsequently, she worked for fourteen years in the field of anesthesiology and for eleven years as a Medi-Cal consultant on both the county and state level in California.

She retired in 1979 and is now residing in Orangevale, California, with her husband, Joseph Holiak, who has served for many years as the first elder of the Russian SDA church in San Francisco. They both enjoy country living, cultivating their fruit trees and vegetable garden.

Over the years Dr. Popoway has contributed to several worthy causes. Her generous gift to the realization of this book, *The Advent Hope for Human Hopelessness*, is a tangible expression of her desire to honor the memory of her father, Pastor Max Popow, who rests in the Lord, "awaiting our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:13).

PREFACE

Why should anyone wish to write another book on the Second Advent when in recent years a rash of books have appeared dealing with different aspects of this doctrine? My major reason is the keen disappointment I have experienced in reading much of this literature. The cause of my disappointment has been what I perceive to be an arbitrary and often irresponsible interpretation of Biblical End-time prophecies on the part of many liberal and conservative writers.

Liberal writers generally reject much of what the Scripture teaches about the Second Advent. They interpret the notion of Christ's Return to this earth as a mythical expression designed to make eternity real in the present experience of the believer. Some of them view the Parousia as a symbol of God's final triumph, but they are most vague about how it is supposed to come about. This existential interpretation negates the Biblical view of the Second Advent as a universal and visible revelation of Christ's power and glory, and the consummation of His redemptive work.

Conservative writers accept the reality of Christ's Second Coming to this earth. However, much of their writings shows more interest in formulating timetables and/or sequence of events leading to and following the Second Advent than in helping believers to understand the relevance of the Advent Hope for their lives today.

Much of the discussion in books written by conservative authors centers around such topics as the time of the translation of the Church (before, during, or after the tribulation), the events which are supposed to take place during the final seven-year tribulation, and the role that Israel, Russia, the European Economic Community, and China will allegedly play in bringing about the Battle of Armageddon. This excessive preoccupation with spying out the immediate future adversely affects Christian life and practice. It makes sight more important than faith. It encourages people to wait for the happening of impersonal events rather than for the Coming of a personal Savior.

These prevailing conflicting and confusing views are causing ordinary Christians either to abandon their hope in the Return of Christ, or to turn the Bible into a crystal ball through which to forecast major events that are supposed to happen before and after the Coming of Christ.

The more I have become painfully aware of how much the Advent Hope is suffering today on the part of friends and foes, the more I felt led by God to “get into the act.” Finally I decided to request of Andrews University a six-month research study leave-of-absence during each of the last four years, so that I could prepare a balanced study to help believers more fully to understand and appreciate the certainty, imminence, and relevance of Christ’s Return.

Target Audience. I have prepared this study with two specific audiences in mind: Seventh-day Adventists and Christians in general. To my fellow SDA believers I hope to offer an articulate and comprehensive presentation of “the hope that is in [us]” (1 Pet. 3:15). In spite of the fundamental importance Seventh-day Adventists attach to the doctrine of the Second Advent—as indicated by the very Church’s name—no comprehensive theological study of this vital doctrine has been produced during the history of our Church. Thus, this book should fill an existing need.

To Christians in general I wish to present an Adventist understanding of the doctrine of the Second Advent. Regrettably our Seventh-day Adventist understanding of End-time prophecies has often been misunderstood and misrepresented. Anthony A. Hoekema, for example, writes in his book *The Bible and the Future*, “Seventh-day Adventists teach that at the end of every person’s life there will be ‘an investigative judgment’ to determine whether he will be saved or lost.”¹

Obviously, this is not what informed Adventists believe and teach. The “investigative judgment,” as will be shown in Chapter 14, is not designed to enable God to determine at the end of each person’s life what his or her destiny should be, but rather to enable intelligent moral beings fully to understand and accept the rightness of God’s final judgment. Misunderstandings such as this could have resulted from inadequate exposition in Adventist literature.

Author’s Hope. It is my fervent hope that this study will contribute not only to dispel some misunderstandings but also to lead many Christians thinkers to appreciate the uniqueness of the Seventh-day Adventist understanding and experience of vital truths related to the Return of Christ.

It has been for me a most gratifying experience during the last few years to receive hundreds of letters and reviews from scholars of differing religious persuasions who read my two books *From Sabbath to Sunday* and *Divine Rest*

for Human Restlessness. In many instances these letters and reviews express a willingness to re-examine the Biblical validity and value of the principle and practice of Seventh-day Sabbath-keeping as upheld by the Seventh-day Adventist Church. It is my fervent hope that this study might elicit similar positive responses on the equally unique Adventist understanding of the Second Advent.

Style. I have attempted to write in a simple, non-technical language that an average lay-person should understand. The use of technical terms such as apocalyptic, Christological, eschatology, hermeneutics, and Parousia has been minimized. Where I have used them, I have defined their meaning.

To facilitate the reading of the book, each chapter is divided into major parts, each of which is subdivided by headings and subheadings. A brief concluding summary is given at the end of each chapter. Unless otherwise specified, all the Bible texts are quoted from the Revised Standard Version, copyrighted in 1946 and 1952 and published by Zondervan Publishing House.

Acknowledgments. It is a most difficult task for me to acknowledge my indebtedness to the many persons who have directly or indirectly contributed to the realization of this book. Indirectly, I feel indebted to the many authors who have written on the subject of the Second Advent, even if in most instances I could not endorse all their views. The reading of these books have stimulated my thinking and thus, deepened my appreciation for the Advent Hope.

Directly, I want to express my gratitude to my former teacher, Dr. Beverly B. Beach, for taking time in his busy schedule to improve the text and to make valuable suggestions. Very special thanks go to Dr. Leona Glidden Running, my former Hebrew teacher and for many years Professor of Biblical Languages at Andrews University Theological Seminary. She has given unstintingly countless hours and her skill, first to correct the manuscript and then to proofread the typesetting. Words are inadequate to express my gratitude for her valuable service.

To Dr. W. Richard Leshner, President of Andrews University, I wish to express my heartfelt gratitude for taking time in the midst of a most busy schedule, to read my manuscript and to write a most gracious foreword. I owe thanks also to Elder Carl Coffman, Chairman of the Religion Department at Andrews University, for reading the manuscript and making valuable comments. Joe Maniscalco is to be credited for the painting of the Second Advent prepared especially for the cover.

Words are inadequate to express my deep gratitude to Dr. Helen Lucille Popoway, a retired medical doctor. Her generous gift made possible the Italian translation and publication of this book. Her desire to help worthy causes is not only praiseworthy but also of great inspiration to me. She enthusiastically offered to contribute to this project, in memory of her father, Pastor Max Popow, who lived, laboured and died with a faith in the Second Advent of Christ.

Last but not least, I owe thanks to my family, my wife Anna, and our three children, Loretta, Daniel, and Gianluca. Often my children have expressed the hope that this might be the last book I am going to write. Without the love, patience, and encouragement of my family, this book would have never seen the light of day.

These pages have been written with the earnest desire to help people who are called to live among the uncertainties and troubles of this present world to find meaning, courage, and hope through the certainty of the soon-Coming Savior. His Coming is Good News! It is *The Advent Hope for Human Hopelessness*.

ENDNOTE

1. Anthony A. Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future* (Grand Rapids, 1979), p. 253.

Chapter 1

THE NATURE OF BIBLICAL HOPE

Life without hope is like a body without food. Take food away and the organism gradually dies of starvation. Take hope away from the human breast and gradually the person succumbs to a feeling of meaninglessness and despair. No significant human enterprise could ever be conceived and successfully achieved without hope. As eloquently expressed by Emil Brunner, “No spade, no needle, no chisel, no saw would be taken in hand if it were not permissible to believe that something good would come out of it.”¹ The hope of achieving something better fires and sustains human efforts, while the absence of hope weakens any incentive to live and to act (Prov 29:18).

Objectives of Chapter. This chapter has two specific objectives. First, to look at human hope in general, focusing especially on the origin and collapse of the hope in human progress. Second, to examine the nature of Biblical Hope, by identifying some of its chief characteristics.

PART ONE

A LOOK AT HUMAN HOPE

1. Small and Great Hopes

While hope is fundamental to human life and living, not all hoping is the same. A study of human hope suggests that there are at least two different kinds of hope. The first kind can be labelled *small hope* and the second *great hope*.

Small Hope. Small hope is far more abundant. Its chief characteristic is short-range goals. Those who live with a small hope all live and work primarily to reach some immediate personal aspirations. They spend their time hoping for an immediate future for themselves and their closest family members and friends, with no ultimate hope for themselves or for the universal destiny of the human family.

Great Hope. The great hope is rather scarce. Its chief characteristic is far-reaching goals. Those who live with a great hope aspire beyond the immediate fulfillment of their personal betterment, looking forward to the ultimate establishment of a new social order where love and justice prevail an order where both personal and universal aspirations are fulfilled under the government of a loving and just God.

Only a great hope can give meaning and satisfaction to life. To live with a small hope, pursuing partial, immediate aims rather than total, final goals, means to deny the innate human aspiration for ultimate, total solutions. It belongs to the very essence of our human nature to hope beyond immediate and incomplete goals.

In the long run limited goals in themselves are no more satisfying than partial answers. It is only in the context of an overriding great hope that small personal hopes become a dynamic force. It is the ultimate hope of becoming a doctor, a teacher, an engineer that gives value, meaning, and importance to the immediate hope of passing an examination.

2. The Scarcity of Great Hopes

The scarcity or even absence of a truly great hope is a striking characteristic of both ancient pagan cultures and modern materialistic ideologies. The well known Epicurean saying, “Eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we die,” exemplifies the short supply of ultimate, future hope in the ancient world. Paul alludes to this plight when he reminds Christian converts from paganism, “Remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, *having no hope* and without God in the world” (Eph 2:12).²

Hope Versus Desire. Paul’s statement may seem like hyperbole because most Gentiles did hold some kind of hope in a future afterlife. Undoubtedly, Paul was familiar with the prevailing hopes of his contemporaries, because he had been brought up in a Greco-Roman culture. Why then does he describe the Gentiles as “having no hope”? Basically because for Paul any Gentiles’ hope lacked assurance of fulfillment. Their hopes were at best desires which were not accompanied by a concrete expectation of fulfillment. Consequently their hopes had a limited impact upon their living.

Genuine hope must be grounded on something or someone who affords a reasonable ground for confidence in its fulfillment and it cannot be divorced from the totality of one’s existence. A true hope enables a person to experience in the present the anticipation of what is yet future. Any hopes held by the Gentiles were only small hopes. They were desires which lacked surety

of fulfillment and consequently failed to engage their whole existence. Paul could thus speak of the Gentiles as “having no hope.”

The situation is not much different today. There are many individuals, some of whom are very intelligent and well educated, who have no great hope for themselves and for the ultimate destiny of this world. They live from day to day, trying to enjoy the passing moment, uncertain about what tomorrow may bring. But to live without a hope plugged into a meaningful future denies the deepest longings of the human heart and deprives life of any real meaning.

Boom in Doom. The scarcity of a great hope can easily lead to despair. The avalanche of recently produce doom-oriented books, films, and other materials indicates that in our society there is today a boom in doom, as many are experiencing and increasing mood of despair.

Different forms of destruction are predicted by various writers. For example, in his book *Heat*, Arthur Herzog forecasts the destruction of this planet through scorching heat caused by too much accumulation of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere (greenhouse effect). George Stone in *Blizzard* foresees destruction in the form of an unending snowstorm. A group of English officers in *The Third World War: August 1985*, forecast disaster through global political disintegration. Fred Warshofsky in *Doomsday* foresees a possible ruin of the earth caused by a reversal of its magnetic fields.

Hollywood too has dramatized doom by earthquake, fire, volcanic eruption, and tidal waves in such popular films as *Earthquake*, *The Towering Inferno*, *The Last Wave*, *Meteor*, *The Day the World Ended*, and *The Day After*. Some companies are doing a thriving business selling survival products. Various factors have contributed to the present mood of despair. One of them deserves special consideration, namely, the progressive disenchantment during our twentieth century with the belief in the evolutionary progress of humanity.

3. The Hope in Human Progress

Renaissance. Western belief in human progress can be traced back to the time of the Renaissance—a humanistic movement that arose in the fifteenth century with the intent of bringing about a cultural and social rebirth. Gradually the Renaissance began to supplant the historic faith in God with confidence in human resources.

In the intervening centuries the hope of many persons in God’s present and future salvation decreased in proportion as their confidence in the human ability to control the future increased. This hope in a progress based on human resources reached its climax during the nineteenth century. Developments

which occurred at that time in several fields contributed to foster optimistic hope in inevitable human progress toward a future golden age.

Enlightenment. In the fields of philosophy and religion, German idealism explained the history of mankind as the continuous unfolding of the divine spirit in the human mind. This idealistic philosophy of human progress was applied in the latter half of the nineteenth century by Lamarck and Darwin to experimental sciences, resulting in the widely accepted theory of evolution.

The alleged past biological evolution from primitive man to intelligent man was interpreted as hope for a similar continuous higher development of the human race. If we had evolved so high above the animal world, there was reason to believe that we could evolve much higher beyond the present state.

This optimistic hope was encouraged by other developments such as the progress in scientific knowledge, the spread of state-funded education, the technological revolution, and the increased political freedom in many nations. These social and scientific developments were seen by many as the certain omen that humanity was surely moving toward a better tomorrow.

4. The Collapse of Hope in Human Progress

Some Causes. With the dawn of the twentieth century, the optimistic hope in human progress rapidly declined. Some of the reasons are not difficult to identify. The frightful destruction of countless lives and property caused by two world wars, the rise of totalitarian regimes contemptuous of the values of individual human life, the holocaust, increased crime and pollution, scores of national conflicts, all of these and more contributed to shatter the hope in human progress.

The pillars upon which this hope rested, such as democracy, capitalism, socialism, human goodness, technology, mass production, and public education, have collapsed under the weight of ever-increasing totalitarian regimes, poverty, hunger, oppression, criminality, and social tensions. The hoped-for utopia of social equality, liberty, and prosperity for all mankind through human progress is becoming ever more a vanishing dream.

A mood of despair is increasingly taking root, as thinking persons are worrying over the threat of world destruction raised by nuclear and/or population explosion, famine, depletion of energy supplies, and pollution of atmosphere, food, and water. To escape from the uncertainties of the future, an increasing number of persons of all ages resort to drugs, whether illegal narcotics or prescribed tranquilizers.

A Faulty Assumption. If we seek to understand the reasons for this change in mood from naive hope to despair in human progress, an important factor appears to be the faulty assumption upon which such hope rested, namely, that man is the master of his own destiny. The belief of the Enlightenment that human beings possess innate reason, goodness and power to construct successfully their future independently from God negates the fundamental Biblical view of the radical sinfulness of human nature and of humanity's total dependence upon God for present moral amelioration and future restoration (Jer 17:9).

Belief in man-made progress deprived history of its God-promised goal. The progress of history became a goal in itself. The guarantee of such progress was to be found in the human capacity to master human nature and the cosmos.

The frightening developments of our age have shattered such a hope of progress based on human emancipation from God. Mankind has shown its inability to subordinate to legitimate and noble ends those technological means which have great potential for the betterment of humanity. The hope that had been generated by the peaceful and constructive use of modern science and technology has been neutralized by their destructive potential and use. The diabolical evils perpetrated in our generation by so-called enlightened people equipped with modern technology have amply shown that mankind is unable to achieve self-redemption.

Emil Brunner perceptively describes this development, saying: "Modern man, who, for the sake of his freedom, emancipated himself from God and became godless, thus became inevitably the destroyer of the divine order of creation, the destroyer of life and finally the destroyer of himself. The greater the resources which progress places in his hands, the more dreadful must be his work of destruction. This is the lesson which humanity has had to learn in recent decades, and in awful contemplation of the nothingness of its optimistic hopes of progress. The monstrous increase in the scientific means of conquering nature have been exposed as dangerous possibilities of universal suicide."³

The collapse of blind hope in the progress of humanity represents then the natural outcome of the replacement of faith in the future establishment of God's Kingdom at the coming of the Lord, with faith in the present establishment of a new social order (the Kingdom of man) through human planning and science.

5. Theologies of Hope

Perhaps as a response to the contemporary mood of despair, some Christian thinkers have articulated what are known as Theology of Hope, Black Theology, and Theology of Liberation. A common denominator of these theologies is the promise of hope for a better future through church involvement in the struggle for social justice. The impact of these theologies has been felt especially in developing countries.

Worldly Centered. Much of the impetus for these new currents has come from Jürgen Moltmann's book *Theology of Hope*. Moltmann wants to recover the eschatological character of the Christian faith, making it relevant to modern people. God's presence, not yet present in this world, is the great future toward which believers are bound. But for Moltmann, the future has hardly any substance. It centers primarily in this world and will be realized through the church's fight to establish justice and equity.

Influenced by the Theology of Hope are the so-called Black Theology and Theology of Liberation. Both of these advocate militant Christian action to redress unjust social or political systems. A common weakness of these currents is their close identification of the Kingdom of God with this present world order.

Being too optimistic about human nature, these theological movements hope to establish God's Kingdom by improving existing social and political structures. "Ultimately," rightly remarks Sakae Kubo, "all such 'this-worldly' expectations will prove illusory and futile since the nature of man remains unchanged. It does not mean that the Christian should ignore injustice and oppression, but through it all he must have a realism often lacking in liberal programs."⁴

Need for Transcendental Hope. Human beings today need a hope that transcends this world and the limitations of human existence. To hope and toil for a future that a person may never live to see is like cherishing a check with a large figure written on it, but which can never be cashed because it was drawn on a fundless account.

A hope that rests solely upon the transient nature of biological life and human resources is, in the final analysis, hopelessness, since death still remains the last word a person will speak to himself. Our hope must rest not on unredeemable human promises for a better tomorrow, but on the surety of God's Word which tells us that the One who came to save us from the condemnation of sin will return to deliver us and our world from the effects of sin. This is the Biblical Hope which we shall now consider more closely.

PART TWO**A LOOK AT BIBLICAL HOPE**

To appreciate the uniqueness of Biblical Hope, it may be helpful to underscore four of its characteristics that distinguish it from ordinary human hopes.

1. God-Centered Hope

Source and Object. Biblical Hope is unique in the first place because it has a Person, God Himself, as both its source and object of hoping. The Psalmist expresses this truth passionately, saying: “For God alone my soul waits in silence, for my hope is from Him. He only is my rock and my salvation, my Fortress, I shall not be shaken” (Ps 62:5-6 cf. 39:7 71:5). Note that the Psalmist acknowledges that his hope is not only *from* but also *in* God who is his rock and salvation. New Testament writers also speak of God as the ground and object of the Christian hope. Peter, for example, writes, “your faith and hope are in God” (1 Pet 1:21; cf. 4:19).

Similarly Paul declares, “May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope” (Rom 15:13). God is here called “the God of hope” because He fills the believer with the fruits of hope, namely, “joy and peace.”

Hope is derived from God’s provision of salvation through Jesus Christ. This is why Paul does not hesitate to equate Christ explicitly with hope, when he writes: “Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Col 1:27). By accepting Christ’s provision of salvation the believer is “born anew to a living hope” (1 Pet 1:3) of eternal life and fellowship with God (Rev 21:3).

A Great Hope. Being rooted not on limited human resources, but on the omnipotent God and Savior, the Biblical Hope is a great hope for several reasons. First, because it is guaranteed by the almighty power and boundless love of God (Titus 1:2; 2 Thess 2:16-17). Second, because it embraces not the single believer but the whole of humanity. Paul expresses this truth emphatically when he says “We have our hope set on the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of those who believe” (1 Tim 4:10). Third, because it rests not on impersonal, contingent, variable factors, but on the personal, unchangeable Creator and Savior who is “the same yesterday and today and forever” (Heb 13:8). Lastly, because God by His Spirit can instill such a hope in the heart of believers (Col 1:27; 1 Pet 1:3).

Human hopes are small because they are contingent upon unpredictable factors. A student’s hope to get a good grade on a test is contingent upon such

unpredictable factors as mastery of the subject, type of questions, physical fitness, etc. Biblical Hope is great because is rooted not in the unpredictable human resources, policies, and programs, but on the unshakable assurance of God's creative and redemptive purpose that will be brought "to completion at the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil 1:6). It is a hope, as Paul S. Minear perceptively points out, "that does not point to what a man has in himself, or what God does by himself; rather, it signifies what God by his faithful work instills in man and what man by his patient trust attributes to God."⁵

2. Advent-Centered Hope

A second distinctive feature of Biblical Hope is that it centers on the Coming of the Lord. In the next two chapters we shall see how the hope in the Coming of the Lord is a dominant theme in both the Old and New Testaments. In the former, the final salvation and retribution are frequently presented as a divine visitation (Is 35:4; 26:21; Zech 14:3-5; Mic 1:3-4). In the latter, the meaning of the Old Testament Advent expectation is clarified. Its fulfillment is shown as taking place in two phases: a First and a Second Advent.

Unique Biblical Teaching. This hope in the Coming of the Lord is uniquely Biblical. Among other religions are found, though in a cruder form, the notions of death, resurrection, judgment, heaven and hell, but not the belief in a Creator who comes into this world a first time to redeem and a second time to restore His people (Heb 9:28). Salvation in pagan religions is conceived primarily as a human ascension toward God and not a divine descent toward mankind. In other words, salvation is achieved by human being *going up* to God and not God *coming down* to rescue human beings.

This belief in God's coming into this world a first time as an unpretentious human being to save His people from sin, and a second time as a glorious King to restore people and things to their original perfection, makes the Biblical Hope unique. Contrary to mundane hope which rests primarily on a future possibility, Biblical Hope is rooted on a victory already gained in the past by Christ at His First Advent, a victory that constitutes the prelude and surety of the final victory to be celebrated at the Second Advent (Col 2:15).

Center of Biblical Hope. Christ's first Advent constitutes the center of Biblical history and hope of salvation. From this center, the line of salvation history runs backwards through the covenant people to creation and forward through the mission of the church to the Second Advent and final restoration. Being the center of the history of salvation, Christ's first Advent is also the center of Biblical Hope, since on the one hand it fulfills the Old Testament

hope of messianic redemption, and on the other it guarantees the New Testament hope of ultimate restoration to be accomplished at and through the Second Advent.

Biblical Hope to a large extent can be identified with the Advent Hope. The latter, however, must be viewed as encompassing both the First and Second Advents. To restrict the Advent Hope only to the Second Coming of Christ is to reduce the scope, the certainty and experience of God's salvation which is grounded on the First Advent. As expressed in 1 Peter 1:3-5, our hope for a future "salvation ready to be revealed in the last time" is founded on the fact that "by his great mercy we have been born anew to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead."

3. Continuous Hope

Present Anticipation of the Future. A third significant characteristic of Biblical Hope is its sense of continuity and close connection between what is expected in the future and what is being experienced in the present. Ordinarily, human hope arises out of uncertainty and necessity. It is a hoping for something not yet experienced but expected to materialize sometime in the future. A jobless person, for example, hopes someday to find a job. Biblical Hope, however, arises not out of uncertainty and necessity, but out of certainty and present possession. It is a present anticipation of the future.

Existential Continuity. Biblical Hope is continuous because it embraces the past, the present, and the future. The future that is hoped for is not a radical abandonment of present experiences, but rather the full realization of the divine benefits already received.

The believer already enjoys in the present the "first fruits" (Rom 8:23) and the "earnest" (2 Cor 1:22; 5:5) of greater blessings yet to be experienced at the Second Advent. This is why hope is associated with faith and love, both of which are present possessions (1 Cor 13:13; Rom 5:1-5). Through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, the believer already has "tasted the goodness of the word of God and the power of the age to come" (Heb 6:5). Thus, Paul could write that "hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us" (Rom 5:5).

Terminological Continuity. The sense of continuity between the present and the future is reflected in the double meaning attributed to certain terms by New Testament writers. "Every Bible reader," notes Hendrikus Berkhof, "can confirm that with the help of a concordance. *Life everlasting* points mainly to the future, but especially in John it means also the life which

is already present by faith in Christ . . . The *day* is the day of Christ's appearance but also the day of salvation which is now by virtue of the Spirit, and especially the great day of the coming judgment. The *hour* or *time* (Greek: *Kairos*) is in the first place the hour of the Son of Man, the time which has been fulfilled but also the hour in which the Spirit awakens us, the 'time of His pleasure,' and 'the fullness of time' to which we are looking forward. The *Judgment* is that for which Christ came into the world, which the Spirit continues in the church and the world, and which one day will be fully executed."⁶

Meaning to the Future. This sense of continuity between the present and the future gives certainty and meaning to the future. The Christian hope for a future new life, new world, new relationships, has meaning because its first fruits (Rom 8:23) are already experienced in the present. "For this reason," writes Emil Brunner, "the Christian lives in the joy of a present fulfillment of meaning as much as he longingly awaits it in the midst of the sorrows of this present life."⁷

Paul S. Minear compares this continuous quality of Biblical Hope to "a horizon within which God sets man's past, present, and future. Hope is not a dream about tomorrow that is subject to change as each tomorrow becomes today. It is a reality that reveals the future in the past and the past in the future."⁸

4. Comprehensive Hope

A fourth distinctiveness of Biblical Hope is its comprehensiveness. It includes the total aspirations both of the individual and of mankind. Ordinary human hopes are partial, subject to change, and easily detachable from the whole context of life. A child initially may hope for a toy car, then gradually his hope may shift to a tricycle, a bicycle, a motorbike, a car, etc. New hopes gradually replace old ones as each tomorrow becomes today.

Comprehensive in Scope. Biblical Hope, by contrast, is comprehensive and unchangeable, because it is grounded on the immutable God. It is comprehensive in scope because it embraces God's saving purpose both for the individual and for all mankind (Heb 13:8; 1 Cor 15:28). In fact, the scope of Biblical Hope extends beyond the human family to include the subhuman creation "Not only the creation, but we ourselves, . . . wait for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we are saved (Rom 8:23-24).

Comprehensive in Content. Biblical Hope is comprehensive in content because it encompasses our fondest expectations. Though we faintly grasp

how God's redemptive purpose will be ultimately consummated, we live in the assurance that "what God has prepared for those who love him" (1 Cor 2:9) will surpass our fondest and highest expectations. As eloquently expressed by Ellen White, "Higher than the highest human thought can reach is God's ideal for His children."⁹

Biblical Hope is comprehensive also in the sense that it affects every aspect of one's living. The believer who has been born into a "living hope" (1 Pet 1:3), finds such hope so pervasive that it determines the whole outlook of his existence.

One Hope. What this means is that there can never be a moment in our life when our hope in God and His future for us can be substituted with a greater and better hope. This is why the Scripture speaks of one hope: "you were called to one hope that belongs to your call" (Eph 4:4). We share the same hope with those believers who lived at the time of Moses, of Christ, and today. Thus, Biblical Hope is comprehensive both in its content and scope, that is to say, in its promise to fulfill our highest expectations and in its capacity to embrace every believer who ever lived.

CONCLUSION

There are radical differences between Biblical Hope and ordinary human hopes. In the first place, mundane hopes tend to be small, with short-range goals, and contingent upon unpredictable things and events. Biblical Hope, in contrast, is a great hope, grounded in God and in His unchangeable purpose for the individual and for mankind.

Second, humanistic hopes for human progress center on human ability to construct a better future but lead to despair. Biblical Hope, in contrast, is Advent-centered and generates unshakable confidence. Such confidence rests on the belief that true and ultimate human progress will be realized not from within but from without human history, with the Coming of the Lord to this world to restore life, peace, order, and justice to this earth.

Third, ordinary secular hopes arise out of uncertainty and necessity and thus expect a radically different future. Biblical Hope, in contrast, arises out of certainty and possession and thus is characterized by a sense of continuity between the present and the future. The believer already experiences in the present a foretaste of the future age to come.

Fourth, ordinary human hopes are partial and changeable as each tomorrow becomes today. Biblical Hope, in contrast, is total, comprehensive

and unchangeable hope, because it is grounded in God and in His eternal purpose for mankind. For the believer to hope does not mean to think about what may or may not materialize in the future, but rather to live the future intensively in the present. It means to live in the eager anticipation not only of personal redemption, but also of cosmic restoration.

These introductory reflections underscore first of all the importance of distinguishing between the secular and the Biblical concepts of hope. Unless such a distinction is recognized and maintained, the rest of this study will prove to be of little value. Second, these opening observations have shown the centrality of the Second Advent in Biblical Hope. As aptly stated by George E. Ladd: “At the heart of Biblical redemptive truth is the Blessed Hope of the personal, glorious second advent of Jesus Christ” (Phil 1:6) that makes Biblical Hope a unique, living, Blessed Hope.

To appreciate more fully the scope, importance, and relevance of the Advent Hope in the history of salvation, we proceed now to trace its development first in the Old Testament (Chapter 2) and then in the New Testament (Chapter 3). This survey will provide the basis for considering in subsequent chapters existential and theological aspects of the Advent Hope.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 1

1. Emil Brunner, *Eternal Hope* (Philadelphia, 1954), p. 12.
2. Emphasis supplied.
3. Emil Brunner (n. 1), p. 23.
4. Sakae Kubo, *God Meets Man* (Nashville, 1978), p. 78.
5. Paul S. Minear, *Christian Hope and the Second Advent* (Philadelphia, 1954), p. 21.
6. Hendrikus Berkhof, *Well-founded Hope* (Richmond, Virginia: 1969), pp. 19-20.
7. Emil Brunner (n. 1), p. 85.
8. Paul S. Minear (n. 5), p. 29.
9. Ellen G. White, *Education* (Mountain View, California, 1952), p. 18.
10. George E. Ladd, *The Blessed Hope* (Grand Rapids, 1973), p. 5.

Chapter 2

THE OLD TESTAMENT AND THE ADVENT HOPE

How did believers who lived in Old Testament times express and experience their hope in the Coming of the Lord? How intense was their Advent expectation? To answer these questions is by no means easy. The reason is that the content and scope of the Advent Hope grew in Old Testament times with the unfolding of divine revelation.

Objective of Chapter. This chapter attempts to trace the origin and development of the Advent Hope in Old Testament times. Brief consideration will be given to the various themes used to express the hope in the coming of the Lord. This brief enquiry will help the reader to appreciate more fully the sense of unity and continuity which exists between the Old and New Testaments as well as the significance of the New Testament differentiation between the First and the Second Comings of Christ.

PART ONE

THE HOPE OF A COMING REDEEMER

1. The Old Testament Advent Hope

Central Belief. Israel's hope in the future Coming of Yahweh is rooted in her unique belief—unknown in contemporary Eastern religions—that God works and reveals Himself in history. God who had visited the Israelites in Egypt, and time and again in their history, is the same God who is expected ultimately to come to bring the history of this earth to its consummation.

This belief in the Advent of Yahweh—the God who comes—is central to the Old Testament understanding of God but there is a growth in the understanding of how God will ultimately come to consummate His will by restoring order and peace to all the earth. A variety of themes served at various times to express the hope of a future divine visitation and redemption. The combination of experience with a deepening understanding of God’s revelation led to a growing comprehension and spiritualization of the establishment of God’s Kingdom.

Progressive Understanding. In the light of the progressive nature of God’s revelation, we cannot expect to find in the Old Testament a clearly delineated teaching regarding a First and a Second Advent of the Lord. The same observation applies to other major doctrines such as the Trinity, the resurrection of the dead, and the atonement, which can be found in the Old Testament only in an embryonic and germinating form. Yet, taking into account this limitation, we shall see that the Old Testament expresses a surprisingly strong faith and hope in the future Coming of God to judge and to save.

Intense Expectation. The expectation of the Coming of a divine Deliverer grew in the course of Old Testament history and became particularly intense by the time of Christ. The New Testament amply attests the existence of an intense messianic expectation. Luke, for example, says that old Simeon was “looking for the consolation of Israel” (Luke 2:25) and upon seeing the infant Jesus, he exclaimed, “mine eyes have seen thy salvation” (Luke 2:30). On the same occasion the prophetess Anna, seeing the child Jesus, “gave thanks to God and spoke of him to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem” (Luke 2:38).

John the Baptist expressed the same expectation when from his prison he sent his disciples to ask Christ: “Are you he who is to come, or shall we look for another?” (Matt 11:3). The Samaritans shared the same messianic expectation, since at Jacob’s well a Samaritan woman is reported to have said to Jesus: “I know that Messiah is coming (he who is called Christ); when he comes, he will show us all things” (John 4:25 cf. 1:41). At the very end of Jesus’ life, the high priest interrogated him, asking, “I adjure you by the living God, tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God” (Matt 26:63).

2. The Hope of Sovereignty

Rooted in Creation. The expectation of a coming Redeemer, which was intensely alive in New Testament Times, appears in various forms during the course of Old Testament history. The foundation of this expectation is to be found in the creation story which portrays God’s initial coming into this world to bring order out of disorder, cosmos out of chaos.

In a sense the understanding of the doctrine of Last Things, known as eschatology, is determined by the understanding of the doctrine of First Things, known as etiology. A person who views God's initial visitation to this planet to accomplish creation as unscientific, irrational, and unacceptable will naturally reject as equally unscientific and irrational the Biblical teaching of Christ's final Return to accomplish the restoration of this world.

Promise of Glorious Future. The purpose of God's creation is best expressed in the blessing of mankind on the sixth day of creation (Gen 1:27-28), which is followed immediately by the blessing of the seventh day (Gen 2:2-3). Through the first act God promised mankind abundant life ("be fruitful and multiply") and "dominion"; through the second He offered the assurance of His presence and fellowship. By taking time out on the seventh day of creation (Gen 2:2-3) to fellowship with His creatures, God revealed His purpose for the creation of this planet, namely, to share His personal presence and fellowship with His creatures.

This sublime picture is the basis of the future Advent Hope, since it reveals a ground of hope. It tells us that God visited mankind at creation to promise a glorious future destiny not yet fully attained—a future of sovereignty and companionship with God.

When Eden was lost, God's initial promise of dominion and fellowship became the basis for the expectation of the Coming of the Lord to restore creation to its original perfection. Elsewhere we have shown how the Sabbath, being the symbol of primordial perfection, peace, rest, and delight, served to epitomize and nourish the hope of the expected Messiah.¹

3. The Hope of Victory

The First Promise. When the expectation of a glorious future was shattered through human disobedience, the first announcement of a coming redemption was made in the form of a promise: "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel" (Gen 3:15). This promise has been rightly called the *protoevangelium*, that is, the first hopeful good news of victory after a struggle between the descendants of the first pair and Satan's power, symbolized by the serpent's seed (Rev 12:9; John 8:44; Rom 16:20).

The details of how, when and where the conflict would culminate are not given at this juncture, because at this stage these are less important than the assurance of a final solution to the human problem of sin, suffering, and death. This promise of victory through the woman's seed has enabled believers not to look back in despair to a lost paradise, but to look forward in hope to a future

victory and restoration. Though this first promise of human redemption does not explicitly speak of the Coming of a personal Savior, yet it is called messianic, because, like similar later promises, it found its fulfillment in the redemptive accomplishments of the Messiah.

4. The Hope of Universal Blessings

Role of Abraham. The line of the first promise runs through Seth (Gen 4:25-26), Noah (Gen 4:29), and Shem (Gen 4:25-27), to Abraham, who marks a crossroads in the unfolding of the history of salvation. At a time when widespread polytheism threatened the survival of the knowledge of Yahweh, Abraham was called out to live out his faith in the one true God. Because of his positive response, God offered to Abraham not only the hope of a national home (Gen 12:1-2; 13:14-17; 15:7), but also the assurance of becoming through his seed a blessing to “all the nations of the earth” (Gen 22:18; 26:4; 28:14).

This universal blessing to “all nations” points to the Coming of a greater One who would fulfill such a promise. It also expresses, as noted by Walter Eichrodt, “a strong sense that all history is working toward a consummation.”² Faith in the *promise*, as Paul explains in Romans 4:13-16 and Galatians 3:16-18, included faith in the *person* of the Redeemer who would come to fulfill the promise.

5. The Hope of a Coming Ruler

The Blessings of Judah. Passing through Isaac (Gen 15:1-7) and Jacob (Gen 27:27-29), the line of promise narrows down to Jacob’s son, Judah (Gen 49:8-12). The blessings of Judah, like those of Abraham, contain two elements: one national and the other eschatological. The first points to the historical leadership role of the tribe of Judah as the protagonist of the nation: “Judah, your brothers shall praise you; your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies; your father’s sons shall bow down before you” (Gen 49:8).

The second element of the blessings is the eschatological hope of a coming victorious Ruler who will establish an age of edenic fruitfulness: “The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet, until he [Shiloh] comes to whom it belongs; and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples. Binding his foal to the vine and his ass’s colt to the choice vine, . . .” (Gen 49:10,11).

Shiloh. Though the ancient rabbis disagreed on the root meaning of *Shiloh*, they practically all agreed in applying the term to the Messiah. For example, the Targum of Aquila (Onkelos), who was a pupil of Gamaliel,

renders it as follows: “until the Messiah comes, to whom belongs the Kingdom and him the nations shall obey.”³ These passages from Genesis offer the first examples of how the hope in a coming Redeemer was initially expressed. The predictions and expectations of a national home and ideal king served to embody the larger hope of future salvation and ultimate victory for all mankind.

6. The Hope of a Prophet-Like-Moses

Liberator and Communicator. The coming of Moses as the liberator of the Israelites from Egyptian servitude and as communicator of the divine will served to shape further the hope of what the expected Redeemer would be like, namely, “a prophet-like-Moses.” We are told that before his death, Moses assured his people that “The Lord your God will raise up from you a prophet like me from among you, from your brethren—him you shall heed . . . I [the Lord] will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him” (Deut 18:15, 18).

The words “a prophet like me” may not refer exclusively to one specific prophet but to a prophet that God would raise up as often as necessary. The context suggests this interpretation, since the singular “the prophet” (vv. 20-22) is used again but collectively to include each and every false seer. Nevertheless, this prophecy about the coming of a prophet comparable to Moses contributed significantly to foster the expectation of the coming of a Great Prophet-Deliverer.

John’s Gospel. John’s presentation of Jesus is frequently set against the background of the Old Testament portrayal of Moses and of the Jewish expectation of a “Prophet-like-Moses.” For example, Philip told Nathanael “We have found him of whom Moses . . . wrote” (John 1:45). Jesus Himself said: “If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote of me” (John 5:46). When the people saw the miracle of the multiplication of bread, they exclaimed: “This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world!” (John 6:14. Similar allusions to Christ as the expected “Prophet-like-Moses” are found in other places of the Gospel of John (1:21-34; 4:19-26; 6:69; 7:40, 52).

It is worth noting how the form of the expectation of the coming Deliverer was inspired by a concrete historical situation. In the case of Abraham, the promise of a national home served to foreshadow the expectation of universal blessings to mankind. In the case of Moses, his prophetic role and order became a prototype of the Great Prophet who would come to reveal God’s will.

7. The Hope of a Redeemer-King

David's Reign. The establishment of the monarchy added a new dimension to the expectation of the coming Redeemer. The splendid reigns of David and Solomon, who brought unprecedented security and prosperity to tribes in anarchy and hopelessness, served to express the hope in the coming of the Redeemer-King. Just as the coming of the prophet Moses contributed to herald the future Deliverer as a Prophet, so now the establishment of the monarchy aided to proclaim the awaited Savior as King.

To appreciate how David's reign became the vehicle of messianic expression, we must note the important role played by this king in bringing about social and religious reforms. David distinguished himself by promoting the worship of Yahweh and by planning the construction of the temple (2 Sam 7:1-17). His fidelity to God was so notable and the consequent justice and prosperity so evident, that his reign became a model and anticipation of the ideal King to come.

Nathan's Prophecy. When David confided to the prophet Nathan, his chaplain and counselor, his desire to build a Temple, the prophet told the king, "when your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise your offspring after you, who shall come forth from your body, and I will establish his kingdom . . . And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure for ever before me; your throne shall be established for ever" (2 Sam 7:12, 16).

This prophecy exemplifies how a historical event became the basis for a messianic revelation. The appointment of Solomon as successor to David's throne and as builder of the Temple pointed to God's establishment of a kingdom and a throne which would last for ever. Thus the kingdom of David and of Solomon became a prototype of the future Messianic Kingdom.

Idealization of the King. The idealization of King David as symbol of a future Messianic Deliverer is expressed in the Old Testament in a variety of ways. For example, Hannah, the mother of Samuel, in her prophetic utterance says: "The Lord will judge the ends of the earth; he will give strength to his king, and exalt the power of his anointed" (1 Sam 2:10). The implication of this passage is that the king is God's instrument for the manifestation of His justice in the world (cf. 2 Sam 23:1-7). Elsewhere the king is adopted by the Lord as His son (2 Sam 7:13), is assured an everlasting kingdom (2 Sam 7:12-13; Ps 89:20-29, 34-37), and is endowed by the Spirit of God with wisdom and power (1 Sam 10:6-7).

This idealization of the role of the king must be viewed not merely as the expression of political aspirations for world dominion, but rather as the prophetic expression of faith in the saving activity of God who will ultimately come to establish peace and righteousness on this earth. Such a prophetic faith is revealed especially in the so-called “Royal Psalms” and in the writings of several prophets.

Royal Psalms. In the “Royal Psalms” (Ps 2; 21; 45; 72; 100), the king is adopted by God as His son and representative over the nations of the earth (Ps 2:7-8). He judges the people with righteousness (Ps 72:2, 7, 12-14), appears to the faithful in dazzling majesty (Ps 45:3-4; 110:3), and consumes the enemies with fire at his appearance (Ps 21:9-10). He is “a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek” (Ps 110:4). His “divine throne endures forever and ever” (Ps 45:6), “his fame continues as long as the sun” (Ps. 72:17), all nations bless and praise him forever (Ps 45:17; 72:17), and the land blesses his reign with abundant harvest (Ps 72:17,3).

Messianic King. The message of the prophets further nourished the expectation of a Messianic King. Amos, for example, proclaimed: “In that day I will raise up the booth of David that is fallen and repair its breaches, and raise up its ruins, and rebuild it as in the days of old” (Amos 9:11). The expected Messiah is here described as the restorer of the fallen “booth of David.” The idealized reign of David is used by Amos to portray the messianic time which is described as a time of unparalleled peace and prosperity (Amos 9:13-14).

Micah announces the birthplace of the Messianic Ruler, namely, Bethlehem, the village of David (Mic 5:2). He shall “feed his flock in the strength of the Lord . . . and he shall be great to the ends of the earth” (Mic 5:4). Zechariah predicts the fulfillment of the Davidic promise with these exulting words: “Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, . . . and he shall command peace to the nations; his dominion shall be from sea to sea” (Zech 9:9-10).

Obviously, no historical king did or ever could fulfill all these extraordinary expectations. Yet the expectation of a coming Savior-King survived because such hope ultimately rested not on the pretensions of a human king but on the faith that God will ultimately come to establish His Kingdom. Thus, the idealization of the figure of the king represents one of the “various ways [through which] God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets” (Heb 1:1). Being a figure readily understood in those days, God used it effectively to nourish the faith of His people in the future coming of a Savior-King.

8. The Hope of a Child-Deliverer

Peaceful Nature. The figure of the expected Savior-King was greatly enriched by the message of those prophets who often emphasize the moral, social, mediatorial and peaceful nature of His mission. Isaiah, for example, predicts the birth of a Child-Deliverer whose name shall be called “Immanuel” (Is 7:14). Some exegetes hesitate to regard this passage as a messianic prophecy since a child by that name could easily have been born to Isaiah’s own wife.

Two other announcements, however, have a clear messianic character. In Isaiah 9:6, the expected Child-Deliverer is called “Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.” His reign is described as being one of endless peace and righteousness (Is 9:7).

In Isaiah 11:1-8, the messianic nature of the Child-Deliverer is emphasized even more through the description of His divine anointing, which would give Him wisdom and knowledge to rule the world in righteousness and justice. His government is characterized by endless peace (Is 9:7; cf. Mic 5:5; Zech 9:10), justice for the oppressed (Is 11:4 42:6-7; Jer 23:5), and a paradisiacal condition in the natural world (Is 11:6-9).

Noteworthy also is His function as mediator of righteousness (Jer 23:5-6) and of a new covenant relationship and peace between the believer and God (Is 42:6; 49:6, 8). He will watch over His people as a shepherd watches his sheep (Ezek 34:23-24; 37:24). The result of this rule of peace and blessedness is that “the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea” (Is 11:9).

9. The Hope of a Suffering Servant

Vicarious Suffering. The mediatorial mission of the expected Redeemer is also expressed in Isaiah through the well-known figure of the Suffering Servant (Is 42:1-4; 49:5-7; 52:13-15; 53). Confronted with the stubbornness and unbelief of his people (Is 53:6), the prophet predicts that true salvation will come through the vicarious suffering of the coming Servant of Yahweh.

“All we like sheep have gone astray we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.” “But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that made us whole, and with his stripes we are healed” (Is 53:6). Because of His voluntary atoning suffering, the Servant of Yahweh makes “many to be accounted righteous” (Is 53:11) and thus restores the personal relation between the believer and God.

PART TWO

THE HOPE OF THE FINAL ADVENT OF THE LORD

1. The Hope of the Day of the Lord

Misguided Hopes. The various messianic conceptions already considered amply illustrate how strong in Old Testament times was the hope and expectation of a Coming Redeemer. The intensity of such expectation could easily give rise to misguided hopes. Aspirations for material prosperity and sensual enjoyments took precedence over the longing for moral renovation to be accomplished by the Coming of the Lord.

The prophet Amos, who lived during the prosperous reign of Jeroboam II (788-747 B.C.), provides circumstantial evidence of this problem. He rebukes his contemporaries who had turned the Day of the Lord into a wish-fulfilling golden age, saying: “Woe to you who desire the day of the Lord! . . . It is darkness, and not light; as if a man fled from a lion, and a bear met him; . . . Is not the day of the Lord darkness, and not light, and gloom with no brightness in it?” (Amos 5:18-20). The function of the day of the Lord in the message of the prophets is to emphasize the finality of retribution and recompense to be brought about by the Coming of the Lord.

Cosmic Destruction. Amos describes the Day of the Lord as a cataclysmic and catastrophic divine eruption into this world which brings destruction to the wicked and disruption to the physical order: “‘And on that day,’ says the Lord God, ‘I will make the sun go down at noon, and darken the earth in broad daylight. I will turn your feasts into mourning, and all your songs into lamentation’” (Amos 8:9-10).

Some scholars interpret this description as poetic fantasy or as an allusion to a natural disaster. Such an interpretation, however, hardly does justice to the prophet’s claim to have received a revelation of divine judgment of cosmic proportions: “Thus the Lord God showed me: behold, the Lord God was calling for a judgment by fire, and it devoured the great deep and was eating up the land” (Amos 7:4). “This is not to be dismissed as poetic exuberance,” rightly remarks C. R. North. “What Amos seems to envisage is convulsions of nature on something like a cosmic scale. It is genuine eschatology.”⁴

The fact that the convulsion of nature, involving heavenly bodies, is explicitly and frequently associated by later Old Testament prophets and New Testament writers with the eschatological Day of the Lord indicates that Amos stands in the line of a consistent prophetic view of the End. What is

noteworthy, however, is to find such a view so well expressed in what is regarded as the earliest collection of prophetic oracles (about 750 B.C.) that we have in the Scripture.

Noteworthy is also the fact that Amos views the Day of the Lord not only as a destructive judgment, but also as constructive salvation and restoration: “In that day I will raise up the booth of David that is fallen and repair its breaches, and raise up its ruins, . . . the plowman shall overtake the reaper and the treader of grapes him who sows the seed the mountains shall drip sweet wine, and all the hills shall flow with it” (Amos 9:11, 13).

Destruction and Restoration. The two aspects of the Day of the Lord—punitive destruction and saving restoration—are elucidated by later prophets. Zephaniah, for example, prophesied during the reign of Josiah (640-608 B.C.), saying: “The great day of the Lord is near, near and hastening fast; . . . A day of wrath is that day, a day of distress and anguish, a day of ruin and devastation” (Zeph 1:14-15). Such a judgment is not limited to Israel but is universal: “‘Wait for me,’ says the Lord, . . . ‘for my decision is to gather nations, to assemble kingdoms, to pour out upon them my indignation, . . . all the earth shall be consumed’” (Zeph 3:8; cf. Zech 2:10-11).

The ultimate purpose of this universal judgment is not only punitive but also redemptive. Hence, the prophet appeals to all, saying: “Seek the Lord, all you humble of the land, who do His commands; seek righteousness, seek humility; perhaps you may be hidden on the day of the wrath of the Lord” (Zeph 2:3). The assurance of the final salvation of the remnant (Zeph 3:12-13) is expressed emphatically in the epilogue, where Zephaniah urges the judgments against you, he has cast out your enemies” (Zeph 3:14-15).

This theme of the final coming of God for the purpose of judgment and salvation is developed at length by other Old Testament prophets such as Hosea (2:21-23), Isaiah (2; 13; 29; 35; 59:20), Micah (4:1-5), Jeremiah (30:8-11; 50:30-33), Ezekiel (7; 30), Joel (1:15-20; 2:1-11, 30-32; 3:1-21), Obadiah (vv. 15-21), and Zechariah (2:10-11; 14:1-21).

The very last page of our English Old Testament offers the following vivid description of this dual function of the Day of the Lord: “For behold, the day comes, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all the evildoers will be stubble; the day that comes shall burn them up, says the Lord of hosts, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch. But for you who fear my name the sun of righteousness shall rise, with healing in its wings. You shall go forth leaping like calves from the stall” (Mal 4:1-2).

2. Hope in Prophetic Perspective

The Prophetic Perspective. Some object to the eschatological interpretation of the Day of the Lord in the Old Testament because often the prophets present such a day in the context of a historic divine visitation upon Israel or a neighboring nation. Isaiah 13, for example, calls the imminent destruction of Babylon by means of the Medes the Day of the Lord. Therefore, people are to “wail, for the day of the Lord is near; as destruction from the Almighty it will come!” (Is 13:6).

The weakness of this objection is its failure to recognize the existence both in the Old and New Testaments of what has been rightly called the *prophetic perspective*. This enables the prophets to see a near historical event and the distant eschatological Day of the Lord as transpiring simultaneously. We might say that the prophetic perspective enabled prophets to describe the final divine visitation through the transparency of immediate historical occurrences.

Isaiah 13 offers us a fitting example. Here the prophet describes the eschatological day of the Lord on the backdrop of the destruction of Babylon by the Medes, saying: “Behold, the day of the Lord comes, cruel, with wrath and fierce anger, to make the earth a desolation and to destroy its sinners from it. For the stars of the heavens and their constellations will not give their light; the sun will be dark at its rising and the moon will not shed its light. I will punish the world for its evil, and the wicked for their iniquity” (Is 13:9-11).

The Immediate and the Ultimate. This description is an obvious allusion to the universal judgment. What this means is that the prophet sees the historical judgment upon Babylon and the final judgment of mankind as though they were one divine visitation, the same Day of the Lord. This merging of an imminent historical future with the ultimate consummation of history is hard to comprehend for the modern mind accustomed to precise chronological sequences. The latter concern, however, is not present in the prophetic perspective which sees the imminent future as part of God’s ultimate purpose.

George Eldon Ladd rightly explains that “the prophets usually say in the background the final eschatological visitation of God; but since they primarily concerned themselves with God’s will for his people in the present, they viewed the immediate future in terms of the ultimate future without strict chronological differentiation and, thus, proclaimed the ultimate will of God for his people here and now.”⁵

This phenomenon is somewhat similar to the prophetic idealization of the figure of the king considered earlier. As historic King David served to foreshadow the coming of the ideal Savior-King, so imminent historical divine visitations were somewhat perceived by the prophets as a presage or part of the final day of the Lord. This phenomenon occurs also, as we shall see, in some prophetic passages of the New Testament.

The fact that the final Coming of the Lord was often seen by the prophets together with a not-too-distant historical event only serves to show how deeply held was the hope in the Advent of the Lord who would transform the present order into His everlasting Kingdom. The same Advent Hope, as we shall see, is central in the New Testament, thus uniting believers of both dispensations with a common eschatological hope, faith, and destiny.

3. The Hope of the Kingdom of God

Ultimate Divine Triumph. The hope of the final Coming of the Lord is also expressed in the Old Testament through the theme of the Kingdom of God. This theme is generally used to emphasize the ultimate triumph of God over the forces of evil present in this world. The expression “Kingdom of God” as such does not occur in the Old Testament, but the thought of God as King of Israel and of the world is frequently found (Deut 33:5; Is 43:15; Ps 29:10; 47:2; Is 6:5; Jer 46:18).

Though God is already King of this earth and of His people, the prophets look forward to the day—the Day of the Lord—when God’s rule and kingdom will be fully established in this world. Zechariah, for example, says: “The Lord will become king over all the earth; on that day the Lord will be one and his name one” (Zech 14:9; cf. Is 24:23; Zeph 3:15).

The Kingdom of God in Daniel. The hope of the coming Kingdom of God is particularly expressed in the book of Daniel. In chapter 2 the prophet interprets the four parts of the great image as representing four universal empires (2:39) after which “the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed, nor shall its sovereignty be left to another people. It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand forever” (Dan 2:44).

Similarly in chapter 7, Daniel sees the establishment of God’s eternal kingdom through the coming of the Son of Man with the clouds of heaven: “I saw in the night visions, and behold with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and kingdom, that all

peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed” (Dan 7:13-14).

It is noteworthy that Daniel not only predicts the establishment of God’s everlasting kingdom according to a divine universal plan, but also connects such a kingdom with the coming in the clouds of the heavenly preexistent Son of Man. The same description occurs almost verbatim in the New Testament (cf. Mark 13:26; Matt 24:30), thus indicating the existence of a continuous historic expectation of the Coming of a heavenly Son of Man to set up God’s everlasting Kingdom.

Judgment and Advent. Impressive is also the fact that in Daniel the coming of the Son of man is preceded by a pre-Advent judgment conducted in a celestial court to determine who is worthy to be resurrected to “everlasting life” and who to “everlasting contempt” (Dan 7:9-14, 21-22, 26; 12:1-2; cf. Is 25:6-8; 26:19). The association of a divine judgment and resurrection with the Second Advent is found in the New Testament (2 Tim 4:1-2; 2 Cor 5:10; 2 Thess 1:5-10). To the study of these events we shall return later.

For the present, it suffices to note the existence in Old Testament times of a passionate longing for the Advent of the Lord to set up His Kingdom on this earth. The judgment, the Coming of the Son of Man, and the resurrection of the dead were seen as part of this climactic event.

4. The Hope of the New Earth

The hope in the final Coming of the Lord is also associated in the Old Testament with the ultimate restoration of this earth and human life. In the Old Testament, as Edmond Jacob perceptively notes, “Yahweh does not come because the world is going to end, but his coming brings, among other things, the end of the world or more exactly the end of an age, which will be followed by a new period of the world. And as Yahweh is the God who creates life, the catastrophic aspect of eschatology could never be the last word of his coming. The essential place is occupied by the notions of a new creation and restoration.”⁶

Old Testament Final Restoration. The Old Testament hope of End-time restoration encompasses the whole of creation, both human and subhuman. The prophets do not share the dualism between the material and spiritual worlds, between body and soul, which is present in Greek thought and in some types of Christianity. Their wholistic view sees mankind and nature as partners.

As nature suffers the consequences of human rebellion, so it shares in mankind's reconciliation and ultimate restoration. The hope of restored harmony between mankind and nature is associated with the expectation of the messianic age, which, as mentioned earlier, was nourished especially by the message and experience of the Sabbath.

The future hope of cosmic redemption is expressed most beautifully in Isaiah "For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind" (Is 65:17; cf. 66:22). In other passages Isaiah describes this renewal of the earth as involving peace in the animal world (Is 11:6-9), end of sorrow and sighing (Is 35:10), fertility and blossoming of desert places (35:2, 7, 15), and fullness of the knowledge of God upon the earth (Is 11:9).

New Testament Final Restoration. The New Testament shares the same hope of an ultimate restoration of the whole creation in and through Jesus Christ. Paul affirms, for example: "We know that the whole creation has been groaning in travail together until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, . . . groan inwardly as we wait for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved" (Rom 8:22-24; cf. Eph 1:10; Col 1:20; Rev 21:1-4; 2 Pet 3:11-13).

The existence in both the Old and New Testaments of a common expectation of a final restoration at and through the coming of the Lord serves to show again how believers in both dispensations share a common Advent Hope. Naturally those who lived before the Cross could not distinguish between the spiritual redemption accomplished by the First Advent of the Lord and the ultimate material restoration to be realized at His Second Advent. The differentiation between the two Advents, as we shall see in the next chapter, was gradually grasped by the disciples after the experience of Christ's resurrection, ascension, and Pentecost.

CONCLUSION

The foregoing brief survey point to *four basic features* of the Advent expectation in Old Testament times.

Concrete Hope. First of all, the Old Testament hope of the Advent of the Lord was not a philosophical, abstract idea, independent of history, but rather a *concrete hope* linked to time and history. God, who had visited Israel time and again, was expected to come again to consummate His will by establishing a new order of peace and justice. The very linkage of this Advent

expectation with imminent historical events, which failed to fulfill it, served to make the expectation of the final coming of the Lord all the more needed and real.

Growing Hope. Second, we have seen that the Old Testament eschatological hope was a *growing hope*. The development of this hope reflects progressive divine revelation as well as the transforming power of faith in Yahweh. From an indefinite, universalistic hope of blessings and victory, gradually the hope of the Coming of the Lord grew in content, scope, and expectation. The coming of Moses and David contributed to clarify the Old Testament eschatological hope. Their prophetic and kingly roles served to epitomize the nature and mission of the expected Deliverer. Later, exilic and post-exilic prophets further clarified the spiritual nature of the mission of the expected Redeemer whom they describe as a Prince of Peace, a righteous Branch, a suffering Servant who mediates salvation and righteousness to the people.

Cosmic Hope. The hope in the coming of the Lord became increasingly a *cosmic hope*. Significant elements of this hope were belief in a universal judgment, the coming of the heavenly Son of Man with clouds, the resurrection of the dead, and the setting up of God's eternal Kingdom within a new heaven and earth where righteousness and peace rule.

The Old Testament expectation of a universal restoration of the present order, accomplished by the coming of the Lord, found only a partial fulfillment at the First Advent. Even though Christ's resurrection and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit guaranteed the End-time restoration, the latter still remained unfulfilled. The task of clarifying which aspects of the Old Testament Advent predictions were fulfilled and which remained unfulfilled at the First Advent was performed by the New Testament believers under the guidance of the teaching of Christ and of the Holy Spirit.

Vital Hope. We conclude that the Advent Hope was vital to Old Testament believers. It enabled them to live with hope and courage in the midst of adversities. The following words of Isaiah (35:4-10) eloquently express how deeply the Advent Hope was felt and experienced in Old Testament times:

Say to those who are of a fearful heart,
 "Be strong, fear not!
 Behold, your God
 will come with vengeance,
 He will come and save you."
Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened,
 and the ears of the deaf unstopped;

then shall the lame man leap like a hart,
and the tongue of the dumb sing for joy.
For waters shall break forth in the wilderness,
and streams in the desert; . . .
And the ransomed of the Lord shall return,
and come to Zion with singing;
everlasting joy shall be upon their heads;
they shall obtain joy and gladness,
and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 2

1. Samuele Bacchiocchi, *The Sabbath in the New Testament* (Berrien Springs, Michigan, 1985), pp. 54-65. Also *Divine Rest for Human Restlessness* (Rome, 1980), pp. 134-145.

2. Walter Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, trans. J. A. Baker (Philadelphia, 1961), vol. 1, p. 476.

3. Cited in Arthur W. Kac, *The Messianic Hope* (Grand Rapids, 1975), p. 19. For other treatments of the Messianic Hope in the Old Testament, see Aaron Judah Kligermann, *Messianic Prophecy* (New York, 1968) J. Klausner, *The Messianic Idea in Israel* (New York, 1956); H. Ringgren, *The Messiah in the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, 1956); A. T. Hanson, *Jesus Christ in the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, 1965).

4. C. R. North, *The Old Testament Interpretation of History* (London, 1946), p. 126.

5. George Eldon Ladd, *The Presence of the Future* (Grand Rapids, 1974), p. 65.

6. Edmond Jacob, *Theology of the Old Testament* (New York, 1958), p. 318.

Chapter 3

THE NEW TESTAMENT AND THE ADVENT HOPE

The hope of a soon-coming Deliverer was intensely alive at the time of Christ. But, what kind of Deliverer were the Jews expecting? Contemporary documents indicate that differing views existed regarding the person and work of the expected Savior.

Views of the Messiah. Most Jews expected a *political Messiah* of Davidic descent, who was to lead Israel to power, to subjugate the heathen nations and to rule brilliantly. In apocalyptic circles, however, the expectation was rather for a *heavenly Redeemer*, the Son of Man, who was to appear at the end of time to judge the world and to inaugurate a new age.

In the ascetic community of Qumran, there was a strong sense of living in the End-time; but their view of the expected Messiah is far from clear. Some texts seem to suggest that the sect looked forward to the coming of a *prophet like Moses* (Deut 18:18) who would bring fresh divine revelations to the people. Other texts suggest a *priestly* and a *kingly Messiah*. This has led some scholars to speak of a “trinity of saviors” (prophet, priest, king). A more radical messianic view was held by the Zealots who advocated the use of arms to usher in the revolutionary messianic age.¹

Origin of Differing Messianic Views. The existence of differing messianic views may well be derived from the variety of ways in which the Advent of the Redeemer is predicted in the Old Testament. We already noted that the promised Deliverer was expected to be a Prophet like Moses, a King like David, a Suffering Servant, a Heavenly Son of Man, the Lord Himself. Such a composite portrait of the coming Savior could unintentionally give rise to the variety of messianic expectations which existed at the beginning of Christianity.

God's purpose in revealing the person and the mission of the coming Redeemer in a variety of ways obviously was not to confuse His people. The composite portrait was rather intended to highlight the uniqueness, excellency, and richness of His life and ministry. Imperfect human analogies or descriptions of the expected Savior were designed to point to a greater reality which none of them could adequately portray.

It often happens, however, that human beings choose what best fits their scheme or immediate interests. In the case of the predicted Redeemer, the tendency was to interpret unilaterally some of His roles by stressing either His heavenly origin and universal mission or His earthly origin and nationalistic achievements.

Objective of Chapter. This chapter examines how the New Testament reconciles the seemingly conflicting roles of the predicted Deliverer. We shall discover that the answer which the New Testament gives to these questions contains three major elements which we want to consider in the following order:

1. The Assurance of Fulfillment
2. A Present Fulfillment and A Future Consummation
3. Unity between the First and the Second Advent

PART ONE

THE ASSURANCE OF FULFILLMENT

1. Consciousness of Prophetic Fulfillment

Gospels. The New Testament opens sounding the note of assurance that Christ's Coming has fulfilled the Old Testament messianic prediction. Matthew takes pains to show how the significant events of Christ's birth, life, death, and resurrection represent the direct fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies. Mark begins his Gospel quoting Isaiah 40:3 to prove that John the Baptist fulfilled the expected role of a Messianic forerunner (Mark 1:2-3).²

The very *first words* of Christ reported by Mark proclaim that "the time is fulfilled and the Kingdom of God is at hand" (Mark 1:15). Similarly, in Luke, the first appearance of the infant Jesus at the Temple is heralded by the prophet Simeon as the fulfillment of the "salvation which thou hast prepared in the presence of all people" (Luke 2:30-31; cf. 2:38). The theme of fulfillment is also found in Christ's inaugural address reported by Luke. After quoting a messianic prophecy from Isaiah (61:1-2), Christ astonished His congregation by asserting, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing" (Luke 4:21).

A Saying of Christ. Both Matthew and Luke report a saying of Christ which underscores this sense of fulfillment of the Old Testament Advent Hope: “Blessed are the eyes which see what you see! For I tell you that many prophets and kings desired to see what you see and did not see it, and to hear what you hear and did not hear it” (Luke 10:23-24; cf. Matt 13:16-17). This declaration clearly suggests that the hope of a coming Redeemer of former generations had now become a reality with the coming of Christ.

The expected Kingdom of God is also proclaimed *to have come* (Matt 12:28) or *to be at hand* (Mark 1:15). Obviously, this was not the expected End-time universal Kingdom of God, but a present experience of the messianic salvation. As explained by Christ in His reply to John’s perplexity, the Old Testament promise was fulfilled in His saving mission: “Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them” (Matt 11:4-5; cf. Luke 7:22).

2. Expressions of Fulfillment

Sacrificial System. The consciousness of fulfillment is expressed in the New Testament in a variety of ways. For example, the sacrificial system of the Old Testament is declared to be fulfilled by Christ’s appearance “once for all at the end of the age to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself” (Heb 9:26). This message is conveyed dramatically by the rending of the Temple’s curtain at the time of Christ’s death (Matt 27:51).

Final Age. The messianic last days predicted by Joel are proclaimed to be fulfilled at Pentecost with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:16-17). This awareness of living right at the time of the fulfillment of the redemption predicted in the Old Testament is reflected also in other expressions such as “the fullness of the time” (Gal 4:4, KJV), “the end of the ages has come” (1 Cor 10:11), “it is the last hour” (1 John 2:18). These indications suffice to show how deeply rooted was the conviction of New Testament believers that Christ’s coming had inaugurated the final age predicted by Old Testament prophets.

PART TWO

A PRESENT FULFILLMENT

AND A FUTURE CONSUMMATION

1. Initial Perplexities

The consciousness of New Testament believers that the person and ministry of Christ fulfilled the Old Testament messianic hope did not develop

suddenly or without initial perplexities. Some of the events associated with the Coming of the Lord, such as the judgment of the world, the resurrection of the dead, and the establishment of a new world-order, obviously had not materialized during the earthly ministry of Christ.

John the Baptist's Perplexity. This situation was bound to generate the kind of perplexity expressed by John the Baptist when from prison he sent emissaries to ask Jesus: "Are you he who is to come, or shall we look for another?" (Matt 11:3). Apparently, when John preached "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt 3:2), what he meant was that the Lord was coming to inaugurate His everlasting Kingdom by bringing judgment and salvation. In typical prophetic perspective, John saw the final salvation as taking place in the near future with the coming of the Lord.

It is noteworthy that Jesus made no attempt to straighten out John's theology by arguments. He merely asked John's disciples to reassure him that His ministry provided ample evidences that the messianic salvation had come, even though it differed from John's expectation.³ John the Baptist was by no means the only person who had trouble figuring out how Jesus fulfilled all the Old Testament messianic promises.

The Disciples' Perplexity. The disciples exemplify the same perplexity, for example, by their slowness to grasp and to confess Jesus' messiahship (Matt 16:13-16). Some of them were still apparently confused at the time of Christ's death, since they said: "But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel" (Luke 24:21). In fact, even after the resurrection, some uncertainty still lingered in the minds of the disciples, as suggested by the question they posed to their risen Savior: "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6).

Perplexities Dissipated. Ultimately, these perplexities dissipated as the experience of Christ's resurrection, ascension, and especially Pentecost enabled the disciples to grasp the truth that what the Old Testament seemed to portray as one Advent of the Lord must now be distinguished into two phases: a present fulfillment and a future consummation.

This understanding is expressed at the time of Pentecost by Peter in his speech delivered in the Temple Court where he boldly proclaimed that "what God foretold by the mouth of all the prophets, that his Christ should suffer, he thus fulfilled. Repent, therefore, . . . that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, whom heaven must receive until the time for establishing all that God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old" (Acts 3:18-20).

The early chapters of Acts express the consciousness of both a present fulfillment of the expected messianic age (Acts 2:23-36; 4:10-11) and a future consummation at the Return of Christ. According to Acts 1:11, two men reassured the apostles at the Ascension that “this Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.”

2. The Already and the Yet-To-Be Fulfilled

Christ’s Teachings. The distinction between the present fulfillment of salvation realized at the First Advent and the future consummation of eternal life to be experienced at the Second Advent, though grasped only gradually by the disciples, is clearly present in several of Christ’s sayings.

In Mark 10:29-30, for example, Jesus distinguishes between the rewards His followers can enjoy *in this age* and the supreme gift of eternal life they will receive in *the age to come* “Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, . . . and in the age to come eternal life” (cf. Luke 18:29-30; cf. 16:8).

The “sons of this age” are contrasted with “those who are accounted worthy to attain to that age and to the resurrection from the dead” (Luke 20:34-35). Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit cannot be forgiven, either “in this age or in that which is to come” (Matt 12:32).

The sense of a future consummation is expressed also by the phrase “the close of the age,” which Matthew associates clearly with the Second Advent. The disciples ask Christ, “Tell us, when will this be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the close of the age?” (Matt 24:3).

The same expression occurs again in Jesus’ parting promise of His abiding presence “to the close of the age” (Matt 28:20), that is to say, until His Second Advent and the establishment of God’s Kingdom. At the Last Supper, Christ told His disciples: “Truly, I say to you, I shall not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God” (Mark 14:25; Matt 26:29). The same awareness of a future consummation is found in Christ’s model prayer, where He taught His followers to pray, “Thy kingdom come” (Luke 11:2; cf. Matt 6:10).

New Testament Perception. The rest of the New Testament shows that eventually believers understood the distinction between the present fulfillment of the messianic salvation and its future consummation. The writers realize that the humble earthly career of Jesus of Nazareth did not fulfill those Old Testament predictions which speak of a glorious Advent of the Lord, the Son of Man, to judge the earth, to renew this world, and to reign in glory.

The latter is indicated, for example, by the utilization in the New Testament of the concept and terminology associated with the Old Testament Day of the Lord to refer to the future “day of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor 1:8; cf: Phil 1:6), sometimes called “the day of Christ” (Phil 1:10; 2:16), “day of the Lord” (1 Thess 5:2; 2 Thess 2:2; 2 Pet 3:10), “the great day” (Jude 6; Rev 6:17), but more frequently simply “that day” or “the day” (Rom 13:12; 2 Thess 1:10; 2:3; 2 Tim 4:8; Mark 13:32).

It is interesting to note also how the expression “the last days” used by the prophets to refer to the End-time (Is 2:2; Mic 4:1; Joel 2:28-29; Dan 2:28), is employed in the New Testament in two different ways: in the plural form “the last days” to designate the present age inaugurated by Christ’s First Advent (cf. Acts 2:17; Heb 1:2) and in the singular “the last day” to describe the future age to be ushered in by His Second Advent (John 6:39, 40, 44; 11:24).

Already and Yet-To-Be Fulfilled. The foregoing considerations show that New Testament believers understood the Old Testament promise of the coming of the Lord in two ways: on the one hand as *already fulfilled* by Christ’s First Advent and on the other hand as *yet-to-be-consummated* at his Second Advent.

They looked back to Christ who had come, and confessed: we are now living in the last days predicted by the Old Testament prophets. They looked forward to the Return of Christ and affirmed: the last day, the final age foreseen by the Old Testament prophets, is yet to come. To put it differently, they believed that Jesus’ coming into this world had already inaugurated the expected final age or last days, but its consummation was still future, to be realized at the Second Advent.

PART THREE

THE UNITY BETWEEN THE FIRST AND THE SECOND ADVENTS

How does the New Testament understand the relationship between the “already” fulfillment of the First Advent and the “not-yet” consummation of the Second Advent? Are these two events viewed as being temporally and functionally distinct and separated from one another? Or are they regarded as being essentially united and continuous?

The New Testament offers ample and explicit indications that the First and Second Advents are in a real sense two manifestations of the same event: the Advent of the Lord. The First Coming of Christ represents the guarantee

of the certainty of His Second Coming. This assurance was given to the disciples at the time of Christ's ascension: "This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11).

1. Unity in the Vocabulary of the Blessed Hope

The redemptive unity existing between the fulfillment of salvation at the First Advent and its consummation at the Second Advent is well-expressed in Hebrews 9:28: "Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him." This sense of unity between the First and Second Advents is exemplified especially by the vocabulary of the "blessed hope" (Titus 2:13), namely through the three terms *Parousia*, *Revelation*, and *Appearing*.

Parousia. The first word, *Parousia*, is a Greek term which is translated "coming," "arrival," or "presence." Note that this term is used in the New Testament to refer both to Christ's First Advent (2 Pet. 1:16) and to His Second Advent (1 Thess 3:13; 4:15; James 5:7,8; 1 John 2:28).

Revelation. Similarly, the second term, *Revelation* (a translation of the Greek *apokalypsis*) is used to describe both the present disclosures of Christ (Rev 1:1; Rom 16:25; 1 Cor 14:26) and His future revelation at His Second Advent (2 Thess 1:7 1 Pet 1:7, 13; 4:13; 1 Cor 1:7).

Appearing. The third term, *Appearing* (in Greek *epiphaneia*), like the previous two, denotes in the New Testament both the present, invisible manifestation (Titus 2:11; 3:4; 2 Tim 1:10) and the future, visible appearing of Christ at His Parousia (2 Thess 2:8; 1 John 2:28). The two meanings occur together in Titus 2:11-13: "For the grace of God *has appeared* for the salvation of all men, training us 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 Savior Jesus Christ."

The dual meaning attached to these three words indicates that for New Testament believers the future Advent was intensely felt in the present, daily living. The expectation of the future glorious Appearing, Revelation, and Parousia of Christ was regarded as the culmination and consummation of the present experience of His invisible presence.

2. Unity in the Fulfillment of the Old Testament Hope

Another significant indication of the sense of unity between the First and Second Advents can be seen in the New Testament understanding of the fulfillment of the Old Testament Advent Hope. We noted in chapter 2 that

such hope looked for the realization of at least three major events: the judgment upon the sinners, the blessing of the faithful, and the destruction of evil powers followed by the renewal of this world. It is noteworthy that each of these aspects of the Old Testament hope is seen in the New Testament as fulfilled initially at Christ's First Advent and ultimately at His Second Advent.

Final Judgment. The final judgment upon human disobedience is enacted through Christ's life and death on the Cross (John 5:24; 12:31; 9:39; 3:19; Mark 10:45), yet God has appointed a future time "on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed" (Acts 17:31; cf. 2; Cor 5:10; Rom 14:10).

Final Blessings. Similarly, the final blessing of life is bestowed upon the faithful through the First Advent of Christ who "abolished death and brought life and immortality" (2 Tim 1:10; cf. John 10:10; 17:3; 11:26), yet it is at His Second Advent that our mortal nature will put on immortality (1 Cor 15:53).

Final Destruction. In the same way, the final subjugation of evil powers and the accompanying new creation occurred already at Christ's First Coming through the manifestation of God's sovereignty over disorder and disease (Luke 10:17-18; Col 2:15; Mark 3:23-27; Eph 1:20-23; 2 Cor 5:17), yet the destruction of the wicked and the reward of the believers will take place at the Second Coming of the Son of Man (Matt 25:31-45; 1 Cor 15:24).

D-Day and V-Day. Oscar Cullman offers a fitting military example to illustrate the close connection existing between the First and Second Advents.⁴ A decisive battle (D-day) may have been won in the early stage of a war, yet the war will continue for an indefinite time until "Victory Day" (V-day). D-day represents the decisive defeat inflicted on the enemy by Christ at His First Coming. V-day represents the final surrender of the enemy and celebration of victory at Christ's Second Coming. The Christian hope of the final victory at the Second Advent is nourished by the unshakable assurance that the decisive battle has already been won by Christ at His First Advent (Col 2:15).

These examples show the existence in the New Testament of an underlying conceptual unity between the First and Second Advents, both of which are in turn seen as the fulfillment of the Old Testament Advent Hope. Thus, we might say that ultimately, the unity between the First and Second Advents is reflective of the larger unity existing between the Old and New Testaments' understanding of the Advent Hope.

3. Unity Through the Ministry of the Holy Spirit

Assurance of the Future. Several factors enabled New Testament believers to express and experience a profound sense of unity between the present

and the future, the First and Second Advents. A most important factor was the ministry of the Holy Spirit who served not only to usher in the new age at Pentecost—the “last days” predicted by the prophets (Acts 2:16-17)—but also to offer believers assurance and a foretaste of the blessings of the age to come.

In the Gospel of John, the Holy Spirit, called Counselor, bridges the gulf between the Departure and Return of Christ (John 14:16-17). His function is to act as Christ’s representative, counseling, comforting, teaching, bringing things to remembrance, guiding into all the truth, declaring things to come (John 14:26; 16:13-14).

Anticipation of the Future. Paul underscores the vital function of the Holy Spirit in enabling believers to experience in the present an anticipation of the future age. “For Paul,” writes Anthony A. Hoekema, “the Spirit means the breaking in of the future into the present, so that the powers, privileges, and blessings of the future age are already available to us through the Spirit.”⁵ This actualizing, contemporizing of the future in the present life of the believer is accomplished by the Holy Spirit in several ways.

The Spirit first of all assures us of our *divine sonship* and thus of our future inheritance to be received at the Parousia (Rom 8:14-17; Gal 4:4-5; Eph 1:14). Through the Spirit we receive the *first fruits* of God’s harvest, that is to say, we experience the beginning of the great harvest to come at the Second Advent when we will receive “the redemption of our bodies” (Rom 8:23). The Holy Spirit offers us the *guarantee* of the ultimate consummation of our salvation at Christ’s Coming (2 Cor 1:22; 5:5; Eph 1:14).⁶

The Spirit functions in our lives as a *seal* which marks us as God’s possession and thus preserves us unto “the day of redemption” (Eph 4:30; cf. 1:13; 2 Cor 1:22). Through the Spirit we taste “the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come” (Heb 6:5). The indwelling Spirit assures us that “he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit which dwells in you” (Rom 8:11). “Because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit,” Paul writes, “hope does not disappoint us” (Rom 5:5).

Uncertainty of the Future. These various functions of the Holy Spirit point to a common goal, namely, to help the believer experience in the present the certainty and a foretaste of greater future blessings to be received at the Second Advent. The uncertainty felt by many today regarding the reality of the Advent Hope and of the future eternal life may well reflect to a large degree the absence of the influence of the Holy Spirit in their lives.

Divine realities are grasped not through mere intellectual reasoning, but through the reception and illumination of the Holy Spirit. As Paul explains, “we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is from God, that we might understand the gifts bestowed on us by God, . . . The unspiritual man does not receive the gifts of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Cor 2:12,14).

4. Unity Through the Heavenly Ministry of Christ

Counselor. Another significant factor which enabled New Testament believers to conceptualize the experience the unity between the First and the Second Advents, was their confidence in the heavenly ministry of Christ. The latter is, in a sense, closely related to the ministry of the Spirit upon the earth. This is suggested, for example, by the fact that both Christ and the Spirit are called “*Parakletos*” (Advocate, Counselor—1 John 2:1; John 14:16, 26; 15:26) and that both are said to intercede for us (Rom 8:26, 34; Heb 7:25). The Holy Spirit mediates to the believers upon the earth the benefits of Christ’s heavenly ministry (John 15:26; 16:13-14; Acts 2:33).

Intercessor. It is noteworthy that the interim period between the Ascension and the Parousia is viewed in the New Testament, not as Christ’s leave-of-absence or inactivity, but rather as a time of intense activity at the right hand of God on behalf of believers. The Savior’s heavenly ministry is described by such human analogies as “priest” (Heb 7:15; 8:4; 10:21), “high priest” (Heb 2:17; 3:1; 4:14; 7:26; 8:1; 9:11), “mediator” (1 Tim 2:5; Heb 8:6; 9:15; 12:24), and “intercessor” (Rom 8:34; 1 John 2:1; Heb 6:20; 7:25; 9:24).

These analogies indicate that the function of Christ’s heavenly ministry at “the presence of God on our behalf” (Heb 9:24) is essentially redemptive. As expressed in Hebrews 7:25, “He is able for all time to save those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.”

Bridging the Gulf. Our immediate concern, however, is not to explore the nature of Christ’s heavenly ministry—though it is a vital study which is largely neglected in contemporary theology—but rather to note how confidence in the heavenly ministry of Christ serves to bridge the gulf between the First and Second Advents, and thus to reveal the sense of unity, continuity, and progression in unfolding of redemption.

Hebrews 9 offers a good example. Here Christ’s *present* appearance “in the presence of God on our behalf” (v. 24) is associated with the fact that in the *past* He “appeared once for all at the end of the age to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself” (v. 26) and with the hope that in the *future* He “will

appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him” (v. 28).

One can hardly miss the underlying sense of unity and continuity among Christ’s *past* appearance for us on earth, His *present* appearance on our behalf in heaven, and His *future* appearance again on this earth to consummate His redemptive mission. As noted by Dale Moody, Christ’s “present appearance in heaven fills with meaning the time between the two appearances in history. The interim is no vacuum.”⁷

It is the assurance of Christ’s present ministry in heaven that 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” (Phil 1:6). Through Christ, who “intercedes for us” (Rom 8:34), “we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in our hope of sharing the glory of God” (Rom 5:2). In other words, it is Christ’s present heavenly ministry that gives us access to God (cf. 1 Pet 3:18) and reason to hope in a future sharing of God’s glory at the Second Advent.

Link between Redemption and Restoration. In his speeches delivered at the time of Pentecost, Peter sounds the same note of assurance. He proclaims the outpouring of the Holy Spirit to be the proof of the exaltation and installation of Christ in His heavenly ministry (Acts 2:33; cf. Luke 22:69). Peter speaks of the heavenly ministry of Jesus as the interim period between the redemption already accomplished by Christ’s coming into this world and the final restoration to be realized by His Return “What God foretold by the mouth of all the prophets, that his Christ should suffer, he thus fulfilled. Repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out, . . . that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, whom heaven must receive until the time for establishing all that God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old” (Acts 3:18-21).

The author of Hebrews appeals to the believers’ “confidence” in Christ’s heavenly ministry on their behalf, to urge them to “hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, . . . all the more as you see the Day drawing near” (Heb 10:19-25). These examples provide unmistakable evidence that confidence in the heavenly ministry of Jesus enabled New Testament believers to conceptualize the experience a profound sense of unity between the Redeemer who had come and the Restorer who was to come.

The temporal distance or waiting time between the First and Second Advents was, as it were, shortened for New Testament believers by their confidence that Christ was actively working in heaven to bring to consummation the redemption already accomplished on this earth. It is the lack of this

confidence in Christ's heavenly ministry that accounts to a large degree for the uncertainty many Christians feel regarding the reality of Christ's Return. If the heavenly ministry of Jesus, which is the link that joins together the First and Second Advents, is broken, it is hardly possible to keep alive one's faith and hope in a soon-Coming Savior.

CONCLUSION

New Testament believers understood and experienced the Old Testament Advent Hope in three significant ways:

In the first place, they boldly confessed that Christ's First Advent fulfilled the Old Testament predictions regarding a coming Redeemer.

Second, they gradually understood that though Christ's coming had already inaugurated the predicted messianic age, its ultimate consummation was yet future, to be realized at the Second Advent.

Third, through the ministry of the Holy Spirit on earth and of Christ in the heavenly sanctuary, New Testament believers were able to unite conceptually and existentially, that is, in their thinking and in their living, the First and the Second Advents.

The strength and inspiration derived from the assurance of Christ's past, present, and future redemptive accomplishments enabled them and can enable us, to be "waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God" (2 Pet 3:12).

NOTES TO CHAPTER 3

1. For a discussion of the prevailing views regarding the expected Messiah, see M. S. Enslin, "Messiah," *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. George Arthur Buttrick (Nashville, 1962), vol. 3, pp. 360-365.

2. Anthony A. Hoekema notes that "a great many other details of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection are said to be fulfillments of Old Testament prophecy: his birth in Bethlehem (Matt 2:5-6, compared with Mic 5:2), his flight into Egypt (Matt 2:15-15; Hos. 11:1), his rejection by his people (John 1:11, Isa. 53:3), his triumphal entry into Jerusalem (Matt. 21:4-5; Zech. 9:9), his being sold for thirty pieces of silver (Matt. 26:15; Zech 11:12), his being pierced on the cross (John 19:34; Zech 12:10), the fact that soldiers cast lots for his garments (Mark 15:24; Ps. 22:18), the fact that no bones of his were to be broken (John 19:33; Ps. 34:20), the fact that he was to be buried with the rich (Matt 27:57-60; Isa 53:9), his resurrection (Acts 2:24-32; Ps. 16:10), and his ascension (Acts 1:9; Ps. 68:18)" (*The Bible and the Future* [Grand Rapids, 1979], p. 15).

3. The special beatitude that Jesus pronounced in this context ("Blessed is he who takes no offense at me"—Matt 11:6) suggests that He recognized that there was reason to stumble because He fulfilled the prophetic messianic hope in a form quite unforeseen.

4. Oscar Cullmann, *Salvation in History*, trans. S. G. Sowers (New York, 1967), p. 84.

5. Anthony A. Hoekema (n. 2), p. 58.

6. C. K. Barrett explains the significance of the Spirit as "guarantee—*arrabon*," saying: "For Paul also, the gift of the Spirit meant both the realization of eschatology and a reaffirmation of it; so much is implied by his use of the term *arrabon*; the present possession of the Spirit means that part of the future bliss is already attained, and equally that part still remains future, still unpossessed" (*The Holy Spirit and the Gospel Tradition* [New York, 1947], p. 153).

7. Dale Moody, *The Hope of Glory* (Grand Rapids, 1964), p. 226.

Chapter 4

THE CERTAINTY OF THE ADVENT HOPE

Christ's promise to come again stands out, among all that is difficult to comprehend in Biblical prophecies, for its clarity, centrality, and certainty. This promise constitutes the assurance and goal of the Christian hope for a better future. For almost two millennia Christians have confessed in their credal statements belief in the Lord Jesus Christ who "for our salvation *came down* from heaven, and was made flesh. . . and *comes again* with glory to judge living and dead, of whose kingdom there shall be no end" (Nicene Creed).

Objective of Chapter. This chapter examines the Biblical basis of the historical belief in Christ's Return by surveying what the New Testament has to say about it. This survey will serve as a basis for studying in the subsequent chapters vital aspects of the Advent Hope. For the sake of clarity the survey is divided into the following five sections:

1. The Teachings of Jesus
2. The Testimony of Peter
3. The Testimony of Paul
4. The Testimony of Hebrews and James
5. The Testimony of John

PART ONE

THE TEACHINGS OF JESUS

The Gospels. The teachings of Jesus are the logical starting place of an inquiry into what the New Testament teaches about the Second Advent. Our source of Jesus' teachings is obviously the Gospels, which report extensively on Christ's sayings, discourses, and parables dealing with His future glorious Coming.

Admittedly, what the Evangelists report are not the exact words (*ipsissima verba*) of Christ. If that were the case, there would be no differences in the form and content of those sayings reported in the synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke).

The existence of these apparent discrepancies (known as the synoptic problem) has led numerous scholars to conclude that the Gospels' portrait of Jesus' person and teaching is distorted. Lately, however, Biblical scholarship has been inclined to acknowledge the evangelists' intention not to distort facts, but to represent Christ accurately.¹ Variations which disturb our modern concern for accuracy of details did not worry New Testament writers or believers, for whom the basic story of Christ's life and teachings was more important than its details.

Our approach, therefore, will be to interpret Jesus' sayings about His Return as they stand in the Gospels, endeavoring to understand their basic teaching in the light of its historical, cultural, and contextual settings.

Extensive Coverage. Jesus' teachings on His Second Advent are reported extensively in the Gospels. For example, the only long speech of Christ which is found in all three synoptic Gospels (Matt 24; Mark 13; Luke 21), is the Olivet Discourse whose main subject is the Second Advent. In addition, we have numerous explicit sayings and parables as well as implicit symbols and allusions referring to Christ's Coming.

The significance of this extensive coverage should not be ignored. It obviously reflects the importance attributed to the Parousia. For the sake of brevity and clarity, we shall briefly consider only those texts which explicitly refer to the Second Coming, subdividing them into (1) The Sayings of Christ, (2) The Olivet Discourse, (3) The Last Discourse, and (4) The Parables.

1. The Sayings of Christ

Mark 8:38 and parallels. A first significant Advent saying reported with slight variation in all the three synoptic Gospels reads: "For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of man also be ashamed, when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels" (Mark 8:38; cf. Matt 16:27; Luke 9:26).

The setting of this pronouncement is noteworthy. In all the synoptic Gospels, Jesus' words follow Peter's confession, Christ's announcement of His death and resurrection, and His summons to follow Him by taking up His cross. The promise of recognition and reward (cf. Matt 16:27) at the future glorious Coming of the Son of Man follows, then, the challenge to confess Christ and be loyal to Him in this world.

No person who has been ashamed to show his allegiance to Christ in this world can expect to share in His glory at His Return. Another striking feature of this saying is Jesus' confidence in the ultimate triumph of His redemptive mission—a triumph that will be celebrated at His Second Coming.

Mark 14:61-62 and parallels. The same note of confidence is sounded in another Advent saying reported also by all the synoptics, where Christ professes His Messiahship before the Sanhedrin: "The high priest asked him 'Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?' And Jesus said, 'I am; and you will see the Son of man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven'" (Mark 14:61-62; cf. Matt 26:63-64; Luke 22:67-69). In His humiliation before unbelieving judges, Christ professed to be the Messiah and gave as a proof-sign His future "coming with the clouds."

This sign could readily be understood by the council members familiar with Daniel's prophecy: "Behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, . . . And to him was given dominion and glory and kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed" (Dan 7:13-14).

Christ will be vindicated when His opponents "will see" the fulfillment of this prophecy. This means that Jesus' visible Return in glory, to be witnessed by every creature, is the unmistakable proof of the validity of His messianic redemptive mission. Thus, if there were no Second Coming, there would never be a universal vindication of Christ's work.²

Luke 18:8. Luke reports an allusion Christ made to His Return in an unusual context, namely, at the conclusion of the parable of the widow and the judge. The teaching of the parable is that God will vindicate those who do not become discouraged in prayer (Luke 18:7-8). This assurance is followed by Christ's saying: "Nevertheless, when the Son of man comes, will he find faith on earth?" (Luke 18:8).

The connection between this saying and what precedes is presumably twofold. The Coming of the Son of man serves to reveal on the one hand God's vindication of His people and on the other hand the lack of faith on the part of those who failed to wait for Him.

2. The Olivet Discourse

It was perhaps Tuesday afternoon of Passion Week. As Jesus left the Temple, His disciples remarked on the magnificence of its structures. To their surprise, Jesus predicted their total destruction. They were on the way to Bethany and as they ascended the slope of the Mount of Olives, they rested

at a spot overlooking the Temple area. At this juncture the disciples approached Christ privately and asked: “Tell us, when will this be, and what will be the sign when these things are all to be accomplished?” (Mark 13:4).

The Problem. The disciples’ question was obviously about the historical destruction of the Temple. In Matthew, however, the disciples’ question involves two distinct events: “Tell us when will this be [i.e. the destruction of the Temple], and what will be the sign of your coming and of the close of the age?” (Matt 24:3). We can assume that the form of the question in Matthew interprets correctly the sense of Mark. In other words, the reference to Christ’s Coming and to the close of the age which is explicit in Matthew is implicit in Mark’s reference to the destruction of the Temple which apparently was seen as one of the signs preceding the end of the age.

In answer to the disciples’ double question, Christ forewarned them about the occurrence of various signs or conditions. The difficulty is that in Mark and Matthew, Jesus makes no attempt to differentiate between those signs which refer to the historical destruction of the Temple and those which related to His Coming. For example, in Mark and Matthew, Jesus speaks of the “desolating sacrilege” and of the “great tribulation” in the eschatological context of His Coming (Mark 13:14-21; Matt 24:15-28). In Luke, however, these events are explicitly connected with “Jerusalem surrounded by armies” (Luke 21:20).

Solutions. Many conservative interpreters reconcile this difference by interpreting Mark and Matthew in the light of Luke. Thus, the tribulation and the desolating sacrilege are understood as referring to the historical events of A. D. 66-70 which resulted in the destruction of the Temple.

This interpretation has some merits since some of the warning, such as the need to flee from Judea to the mountains, can hardly be related to a universal tribulation caused by an eschatological antichrist. The problem with this view, however, is that the Parousia is place “*immediately* after the tribulation of those days” (Matt 24:29; cf. Mark 13:24), which would mean that the last-days events are viewed as contemporaneous to the historic tribulation and desolating sacrilege of A.D. 70.

Prophetic Perspective. Several other solutions have been proposed to reconcile the apparent tension between historical and eschatological references which overlap in the Olivet Discourse.³ In our view, the most satisfactory explanation is to be found in the so-called *prophetic perspective*, which we discussed in chapter 1. Like the Old Testament prophets, Jesus intermingles historical with eschatological events; that is to say, He sees,

through the transparency of those events associated with the imminent fall of Jerusalem, the fulfillment of those events leading to His Parousia. The linking of the future to the present serves to give added realism to what is to come.⁴

Teaching. The specific signs of the end given in the Olivet Discourse will be considered in chapters 8, 9, and 10. At this point, we simply note what Jesus said directly about His Parousia. First of all, He describes His Coming as a spectacular event bringing about the universal gathering of believers: “And then they will see the Son of man coming in clouds with great power and glory. And then he will send out the angels, and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven” (Mark 13:26-27). This description allows for no secret rapture. In Matthew, the visibility of Christ’s Coming is emphasized through its comparison to a flashing lightning (Matt 24:27)

Second, Jesus teaches that His Coming “is near, at the very gates” (Mark 13:29; cf. Matt 24:33). He emphasizes this truth by pointing to the signs of the approaching summer that can be seen in the budding of the fig tree. The meaning of the imminence of Christ’s Coming will be considered in the two following chapters.

Third, Jesus teaches that “the coming of the Son of man” will be as sudden and unexpected as the flood was for the people living in the days of Noah (Matt 24:36-39).

Fourth, Jesus teaches that at His Return there will be only two classes of people: those who are waiting for Him and those who are not. The drastic separation that will occur between believers and unbelievers is spelled out dramatically: “Then two men will be in the field; one is taken and one is left. Two women will be grinding at the mill; one is taken and one is left” (Matt 24:40-41).

Finally, Jesus warns emphatically to watch for His Return: “Watch therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming: (Matt 24:42; cf. Mark 13:35-37). This is the keynote that Christ sounds repeatedly in His Olivet Discourse: Watch! Literally, “Stay wide awake!” and be ready for my Coming!

This is the closing note of the Discourse itself sounded in all three Gospels: “And what I say to you I say to all: Watch” (Mark 13:37; cf. Matt 24:42-44; Luke 21:34). In the Olivet Discourse, then, Jesus teaches that His Coming is glorious, visible, imminent, sudden, discriminating, and, above all, it is to be constantly watched for.

3. The Last Discourse of Jesus

The Setting. John reports the Last Discourse of Jesus (John 14-16) instead of the Olivet Discourse. The setting is an upper room in Jerusalem where Jesus has partaken of the Last Supper with His disciples on the eve of His death. Judas Iscariot had left the room (John 13:30) when Jesus announced to His eleven disciples: “Little children, yet a little while I am with you. You will seek me; and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, ‘Where I am going you cannot come’” (John 13:33).

Noting their troubled faces, Jesus responded by pronouncing the famous discourse which begins with the reassuring words: “Let not your hearts be troubled; believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father’s house are many rooms; if it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And when I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also” (John 14:1-3).

Christ’s Central Promise. “I will come again” was Christ’s central promise to His troubled disciples and it is still His central promise to us today, often troubled by doubts and uncertainties about our future. Some interpret the words “I will come again” as referring to the coming of the Holy Spirit, called the Paraclete (John 14:18, 28), since the latter is the main theme of the discourse (John 14:15-24; 15:26; 16:4-15).

There is a sense in which Jesus came into the lives of His disciples on the day of Pentecost through the sending of the Holy Spirit (a coming known as “realized eschatology”). Indeed, Christ makes His presence real in our lives through the Holy Spirit who dwells in us (John 14:16). But in the Gospel of John Jesus teaches not only His immediate presence in the believers through the Holy Spirit, but also His future presence through His personal Coming to take His followers to Himself.

Christ comes *to* His followers through the Holy Spirit in the present and comes *for* His followers personally in the future (“I will come again and will take you to myself” [John 14:3]). In John, the future Coming of Christ is not eliminated but rather is actualized through the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

John offers another clear indication of Christ’s personal Return in reporting Christ’s answer to Peter’s question regarding the beloved disciple: “If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you?” (John 21:22). The phrase “until I come” can hardly refer to Pentecost, for John wrote these words many years after that event when the rumor was circulating that John would not die (John 21:23). Its only logical reference is to the Second Coming. It is significant that John closes his Gospel alluding to the prevailing expectancy of the Lord’s Return.

4. The Parables

Wheat and Tares. To illustrate the purpose of and the preparation for His Coming, Christ used several parables. In the parables of the wheat and tares and of the dragnet (Matt 13:24-30, 36-43, 47-50), Christ illustrates the nature of the Gospel age which culminates with His Second Coming.

Both parables teach the principle of religious liberty. During this age no person has the right to separate the wheat from the tares, the good from the bad fish, that is, those who are in the Kingdom from those who are not. The separation is to take place at the End: “The harvest is the close of the age, and the reapers are angels. Just as the weeds are gathered and burned with fire, so will it be at the close of the age. The Son of man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all evildoers, and throw them into the furnace of fire; . . . Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father” (Matt 13:39-43; cf. 13:49-50).

In both parables the purpose of Christ’s Coming is to accomplish a complete and final separation between the righteous and the wicked. The latter, as taught also in the parable of the net, are destroyed in the “furnace of fire” (Matt 13:50). This teaching hardly allows for the view that Christ’s Return will be followed by a millennial age in which Jesus and the redeemed will rule over the wicked.

Ten Virgins. In Matthew the Olivet Discourse is followed by a chapter containing three parables, each using a different imagery to represent Christ’s Coming and to emphasize areas of preparation for this event. In the parable of the Ten Virgins, Christ’s Return is compared to the unexpected arrival of a bridegroom (Matt 25:1-13; cf. Luke 2:12; 35-40). Here the area of preparation underscored is the *spiritual*.

There are certain things which cannot be obtained or borrowed at the last minute. We cannot develop a character or borrow a relationship with God when it is too late. Our lives need to be constantly filled with the oil of the Holy Spirit (1 Sam 10:1, 6; 16:13) if we are to be ready to meet the Lord at His Coming. When the bridegroom comes, the door is shut (Matt 25:10). There is no room for a second chance, as some pre-millennialists advocate. The Advent seals the irreversible decision and destiny of every individual.

The Talents. In the parable of the talents, Christ’s Coming is compared to a Master returning from a long journey to settle accounts with his servants (Matt 25:14-30; cf. Luke 19:11-27). The area of preparation stressed by this parable is the *stewardship* of our resources such as time, money, and skills.

“There are some people,” write Ralph Earle, “who are strong on worship but weak on service. These need to heed the warning of the parable of the talents (vv. 14-30). It is not enough to take care of our spiritual devotion. We must be busy about our Master’s business. We must use the talents He has given us in furthering the work of His kingdom.”⁵

Sheep and Goats. The Coming of “the Son of man . . . in his glory” to judge “all the nations” is also compared to “a shepherd [who] separates the sheep from the goats” (Matt 25:31-32). The area of preparation emphasized by this parable is the *social responsibility* of the Christian who waits for the Coming of the Lord.

The criteria by which Christ will separate the sheep from the goats, the believers from the unbelievers, are not the knowledge, the fame, or the fortune acquired, but rather the attention given to those in need. The specific acts which Christ picks out are: giving food to the hungry, water to the thirsty, welcoming strangers, comforting the sick, and visiting the prisoners.

None of these acts necessarily involved large financial expenditures. They are simple acts anyone can do as he sees human need every day. Such acts are to be done spontaneously, instinctively, not to receive recognition but just for the sake of helping anyone in need, including “the least of these my brethren” (Matt 25:39). The wonderful truth that Jesus presents is that at His Coming He will acknowledge all such acts as if given directly to Himself (Matt 25:40).

Conclusion. These parables, spoken by Jesus toward the close of His ministry, reveal His concern both to assure His followers about the certainty of His Return, and to encourage and admonish them to be ready for His Parousia. This preparation involves spiritual, moral growth exemplified by the wise virgins, good stewardship represented by the good and faithful servant, and social concern for human need manifested by sheep that Christ places at His right hand at His Coming.

All these parables underscore that the final reward that Christ will give at His return cannot be taken for granted. To profess to be a disciple of Christ is no guarantee of salvation. The foolish virgins were invited to the wedding, the idle servant had a share of his Master’s property, the goats belonged to the same Shepherd. Yet they all received retribution instead of reward because their profession was not authenticated by practice.

PART TWO

THE TESTIMONY OF PETER

Peter's witness about the Second Coming of Christ is first found in the Acts of the Apostles. On the day of Pentecost after calling upon his hearers to repent, Peter spoke of God's promise to "send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, whom heaven must receive until the time for establishing all that God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old" (Acts 3:21-22).

In this proclamation Peter implies that Christ will remain in heaven "until the time" when He will return to bring about the final restoration predicted by the prophets. What Peter here implies, he clearly teaches in his two Epistles. In both of them, the day of Christ's Coming plays a large role, being presented both as a day of salvation and as a day of judgment.

1. Day of Salvation

Peter views the Second Advent as a time of "salvation ready to be revealed in the last time" (1 Pet 1:5; cf. 1:9). The believer already possesses "an inheritance which is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven" (1 Pet 1:4). These blessings kept in heaven are to be enjoyed not at death but at the Return of Christ. It is at that time that "the chief Shepherd" will be manifested and believers "will obtain the unfading crown of glory" (1 Pet 5:4).

Peter emphasizes how this Advent Hope can sustain believers in meeting the present suffering. Before the end, which Peter views as near (1 Pet 4:7), believers "may have to suffer various trials" (1 Pet 1:6). These sufferings, however, are to last only "a little while" because Christ will soon "restore, establish, and strengthen" His people (1 Pet 5:10; cf. 1:6). In short, for Peter, the day of Christ's Coming will be a day of salvation in which the blessings presently stored in heaven will descent to believers on earth.

2. Day of Judgment

Scoffers. The second Advent is for Peter also "a day of visitation" (1 Pet 2:12) and a "day of judgment" (2 Pet 2:9) for the unrighteous. Among these are some who scoff and ridicule the idea of the Parousia, 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). This question indicates that the expectation of Christ's Coming was not only widespread among Christians but also ridiculed by scoffers. Today, as a result of the evolutionary theory which is based on the assumption that "all things have continued as they were from the beginning," scoffers have increased in number and vigor.

Peter responds to the scoffers first by reminding them that as this earth was once destroyed by the Flood, so it will be destroyed finally and more radically by fire on “the day of judgment” (2 Pet 3:7). Second, Peter points out that God counts time differently from human beings. For Him one day is as a thousand years and a thousand years as one day (v. 8).

What to some appears as a delay of the Parousia in reality is a revelation of God’s merciful saving purpose: it gives to more people more time and opportunities to repent and be saved (2 Pet 3:9). However, when the appointed time arrives, Christ *will* come unexpectedly as a thief at night (2 Pet 3:10).

Functions of the Day of Judgment. Peter emphasizes two functions of the day of Judgment: “destruction of ungodly men” (2 Pet 3:7) and restoration of this present fallen order (2 Pet 3:10). The central theme of the second chapter of 2 Peter is divine judgment. If God did not spare the angels that sinned, if He did not spare the ancient world when it became depraved in the days of Noah, if he reduced to ashes the wicked cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, He will certainly destroy the unrighteous on the day of judgment (2 Pet 2:4-10; cf. 3:7, 10).

But the ultimate purpose of divine judgment is not destruction, but the complete transformation will purge this earth of all corruption and will result in a new heaven and a new earth (2 Pet 3:10, 12, 13). The description of how this will happen is very dramatic: “the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, and the elements will be dissolved with fire, and the earth and the works that are upon it will be burned up” (2 Pet 3:10).

Some dismiss this cataclysmic description as fruit of poetic fantasy or apocalyptic imagery. But in our nuclear age it is not difficult to visualize how this description could be fulfilled to the very letter. The total destruction of this present order by fire is, however, not the end, but the beginning of a “new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells” (2 Pet 3:13).

The hope of this new world-order provides the incentive for godly Christian living: “Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of persons ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, . . . Therefore, beloved, since you wait for these, be zealous to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace” (2 Pet 3:11, 12, 14).

The Advent Hope, then, with its promise of salvation, destruction, and restoration, is for Peter not only a future expectation but also a present motivating force to holy living. Its implications for determining our values, decisions, aspirations, and priorities will be considered in chapter 16

PART THREE**THE TESTIMONY OF PAUL**

The hope of a the soon-Coming Savior was central to Paul's thinking and living. This is indicated by his frequent and vivid descriptions of the Second Advent. His teaching on this doctrine is unquestionably the most informative and influential of the New Testament. His major contribution was to save the Advent Hope from two blind alleys: *unhistorical spiritualism* and *date-setting sensationalism*.

Paul believed in the imminent Return of Christ, possibly within his own lifetime (Rom 13:11; 1 Thess 4:15; 1 Cor 7:26,31), but he never fell into the trap of date-setting. For him the certainty of Christ's Return overshadowed any consideration of the time factor.

No Spiritualization. Moreover, though Paul actualized the Advent Hope by saying, for example, that we already enjoy "the first fruits" of the Advent harvest (Rom 8:23) and that we already live in Christ (Phil 1:21), he strongly rejected any attempt to spiritualize away the reality of Christ's visible Return. He marvel that the Thessalonians should become so "quickly shaken in mind or excited" by the deceptive teaching that "the day of the Lord has come" (2 Thess 2:2). To counteract this deceptive and disruptive spiritualization of the Advent, Paul explains what development must occur before the Lord's Return (2 Thess 2:3-12).

A convenient way to summarize Paul's teachings regarding the Second Coming is to study the four main designations he uses to describe significant aspects of this event.

1. The Day of the Lord

Decisive Judgment. One expression used by Paul is "the Day of the Lord." This phrase, as noted earlier, is used frequently in the Old Testament to describe both imminent historical divine judgments and God's final visitation to bring salvation to the faithful and punishment to the wicked.

In Paul's letters "the Day of the Lord" denotes the decisive judgment that God will execute through Christ at the End. Such a day is referred to in a variety of ways: the Day of the Lord (2 Thess 2:2; 5:2), the Day of our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor 1:8), the Day of the Lord Jesus (1 Cor 5:5; 2 Cor 1:14), the day of Christ or of Jesus Christ (Phil 1:6, 10; 2:16), and that Day (2 Thess 1:10; 2 Tim 1:18). Such a variety of designations is indicative of the tremendous importance attached to the judgment executed by Christ at His Coming.

Retribution and Reward. The Day of the Lord will be a time when “each man’s work will become manifest; for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one had done” (1 Cor 3:13). For the rebellious it will be a time of dreadful punishment (2 Thess 1:8-10), while for the believers it will be a time of “rest” and glorification (2 Thess 1:7, 10).

Paul is certain the “on that Day” the Lord “the righteous Judge,” will award a “crown of righteousness” not only to him “but also to all who have loved his appearing” (2 Tim 4:8). Christians who look forward to the Day of the Lord, which “will come like a thief in the night” (1 Thess 5:2), are therefore urged not to sleep but to “keep awake and be sober” (1 Thess 5:6), so that they “may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ” (Phil 1:10).

2. The Parousia

Joyous Encounter. Seven times Paul refers to the Advent of Christ by means of the term “*Parousia*..”⁶ This word combines the notion of “presence” (Phil 2:12) and “arrival” (1 Cor 16:17; 2 Cor 7:7), with a suggestion of honor given to the coming person. Paul, for example, describes the pleasure afforded by “the coming (*parousia*) of Titus” (2 Cor 7:6).

The technical application of this term to Christ points to the personal and joyous character of the Advent to which the early Christians were looking forward. Christ, who is seated at the right hand of God, is expected to come back personally to earth again with power and glory (1 Thess 4:16) to raise the sleeping saints (1 Cor 15:23; 1 Thess 4:16), to gather His people, both living and dead, unto Himself (2 Thess 2:1; 1 Thess 4:17), and annihilate the adversary (2 Thess 2:8).

Resurrection and Translation. An essential aspect of the Parousia is the manifestation of the vivifying power of Christ in resurrecting the dead and translating the living (1 Cor 15:42, 51-54). This act represents Christ’s final and complete victory over death, because He will destroy the powers of evil. Immediately after mentioning the resurrection, Paul speaks of Christ’s “destroying every rule and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death” (1 Cor 15:24-26).

With Christ’s victory over death and the resurrection or translation of the righteous, the final phase of God’s Kingdom will be inaugurated. Christ will admit the redeemed to His eternal presence “and so we shall always be with the Lord” (1 Thess 4:17). The Parousia, then, represents the revelation of Christ’s victory through the resurrection and/or translation of the believers, the destruction of the unbelievers and the inauguration of God’s Kingdom.

3. The Revelation

The Advent is also described by Paul as the “revelation” of Jesus Christ (1 Cor 1:7; 2 Thess 1:7). The word “revelation” is a translation of the Greek term “*apocalypsis*” which signifies the “unveiling” or “disclosure” of a hidden reality.

Disclosure of Christ’s Glory. In the case of Jesus Christ, the hidden reality to be disclosed is His exaltation in the heavenly sanctuary at the right hand of God. It is from there that Christ governs the world and intercedes for mankind (1 Cor 15:25; Phil 2:9). However, Christ’s present glorious reign is not evident to the world. Therefore, His Advent will be an *apocalypsis*, a revealing to the world of His present power and glory. Thus, Christians “wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor 1:7).

Disclosure of Human Destiny. The future unveiling of Christ is closely associated with the final judgment which discloses both the works and the status of every human being. The Parousia is the moment “when God’s righteous judgment will be revealed. For he will render to every man according to his works” (Rom 2:5-6). In a sense, the future revealing of Christ’s glory and justice is also “the revealing of the sons of God” (Rom 8:19) because at that time His glory “is to be revealed in us” (Rom 8:18).

Believers who wait for this future disclosure can already experience a foretaste of it through the ministry of the Holy Spirit (Rom 8:18-24). Paul prays that God may give to the believers “a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him” so that they might know “what are the riches of his glorious inheritance” (Eph 1:17-18).

4. The Appearing

Splendor of Advent. Another term employed by Paul to emphasize the majestic and visible aspects of the Advent is the Greek word *epiphaneia*, generally translated “the appearing.” The term was used in the Hellenistic world especially to describe the triumphant and joyful entrance of a ruler into a city. Paul, who presumably witnessed such joyful royal processions, may well have felt that the term could effectively convey the grandeur of the glorious appearing of Christ at His Parousia.⁸

To the Thessalonians Paul explains that Christ will destroy the lawless one “by his appearing (*epiphaneia*) and his coming (*parousia*)” (2 Thess 2:8). In his epistle to Titus, Paul explicitly speaks of the “blessed hope” as “the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ” (Titus 2:13). The Parousia will be therefore not a secret event but a glorious visible

appearing of the glory of God that will cause the destruction of unbelievers (2 Thess 1:8-9).

Grace and Glory. Paul uses the term “appearing” with reference not only to Christ’s Second Advent but also to his First Advent (2 Tim 1:10). The appearing of Christ on this earth was in a sense glorious, since through His incarnation, death, and resurrection He “abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel” (2 Tim 1:10).

At the First Advent there was primarily the appearing of the saving “*grace* of God.” But at the Second Advent there will be especially “the appearing of the *glory* of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ” (Titus 2:11, 13).

The two manifestations of Christ, the first of grace and the second of glory, are inseparably connected. Those who accept Jesus as their Lord “have loved his appearing” (2 Tim 4:8). They rejoice in the presence of Christ while confidently looking forward to “his appearing and his kingdom” (2 Tim 4:1). The certainty of Christ’s glorious appearing is such that Paul appeals to it in his charge to Timothy to live “free from reproach” (1 Tim 6:14) and to fulfill his teaching and preaching ministry (1 Tim 4:12).

Climax of Creation. Like the rest of the New Testament writers, Paul sees the glorious appearing and revelation of Christ at His Parousia as the great event toward which all creation is moving. This event will reveal Christ’s sovereignty, His victory over death through the resurrection of the saints, the final separation between the citizens and enemies of the kingdom, the inauguration of God’s eternal kingdom, and the manifestation of God’s justice and dominion in history.

The Second Advent guarantees that the redemption accomplished by the humble historical Jesus will be consummated at the Return of the glorified Christ. His Advent will transform this physical order and establish God’s rule in this world so “that God may be everything to everyone” (1 Cor 15:28).

PART FOUR

THE TESTIMONY OF HEBREWS AND JAMES

1. Hebrews

Sacrifice, Service, Glory. The author of Hebrews speaks of the Second Advent in the context of his exposition of the superiority of Christ’s redemptive ministry over that of Old Testament priests. Contrary to the continuous

sacrifices offered by the Levitical priesthood, Christ “appeared once for all at the end of the age to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself” (Heb 9:26; cf. vv. 12, 28). His great sacrifice gives to Christ the place of glory and honor at the right hand of God (Heb 1:13; 9:24).

Christ’s entry into the presence of God was not for His own glory but to open the way for us (Heb 10:19, 20; 9:24). The *greatest sacrifice* offered on this earth led to the *greatest service* being offered by Christ in heaven on our behalf. This, in turn, is to be followed by the manifestation of the *greatest glory* when all things will be subjected to Him (Heb 2:8-9). This final triumph will occur when Christ “will appear a second time, not to deal with sin” as such, but to save and glorify “those who are eagerly waiting for him” (Heb 9:28).

A Basis for Hope. A clear distinction is made in Hebrews between the First and Second Advents which are bridged by the heavenly ministry of Christ. The purpose of the First Coming was to deal effectively with the sin problem. The purpose of the Second Coming is “to save,” that is, to grant the promised salvation to “those who are eagerly waiting for him” (Heb 9:28).

The certainty of Christ’s past sacrifice, present service, and future glorious manifestation offers the basis for hope. Thus, the author urges believers to “hold fast our confidence and pride in our hope” (Heb 3:6; cf. 6:11), “to seize the hope set before us” (Heb 6:18), to “hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, . . . encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near (Heb 10:23,25).

2. James

A Basis for Patience. James deals mostly with matters of practical ethics. His concern is to encourage fellow Christians who had to “meet various trials” (James 1:2; cf. 13-14). Apparently, one of the problems these Christians were experiencing was oppression and exploitation by wealthy persons.

In the context of this social injustice, James encourages the believers saying: “Be patient, therefore, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. Behold, the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient over it until it receives the early and the late rain. You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. Do not grumble, brethren, against one another, that you may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing at the doors” (James 5:7-9).

Wrongs Will be Righted. James’s exhortation indicates that the imminent Coming of the Lord was a living hope that served to motivate Christians to endure patiently some of the wrongs of this present life. Instead

of blaming one another for current troubles, believers are encouraged to confirm their faith, knowing that the “Judge is standing at the doors” (James 5:9).

It is obvious that the hope of an imminent Parousia plays an important role in James’s thinking. It can sustain a believer when facing trials and temptations (James 1:2, 12), knowing that soon “he will receive the crown of life” (James 1:12) and the blessing of the kingdom (James 2:5).

James’s exhortation speaks to our present situation where sometimes evil is rewarded and good ignored. We are admonished to be patient, confident that the wrongs of this life will be righted when Christ comes back to set up His righteous rule over the world.

PART FIVE

THE TESTIMONY OF JOHN

1. 1 John

The First Epistle of John, like his Gospel, emphasizes the present experience of eternal life: “We have passed out of death into life” (1 John 3:14; cf. 2:25; 5:11, 12, 13). John reassures Christians who were exposed to a false teaching that denied Christ’s incarnation (docetism) and sought salvation through higher light (1 John 2:22; 4:1) that in Christ, God has already given them eternal life: “God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He who has the Son has life; he who has not the Son of God has not life” (1 John 5:11-12).

Glorifying Hope. Although we have received life and have been born anew (1 John 2:28), we are not yet like Christ. This radical change will occur at His Parousia: “Beloved, we are God’s children now; it does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure” (1 John 3:2-3).

John distinguished between the First Coming of Christ “to take away sins” (1 John 3:5) and His Second Appearing to glorify the believers. It is at the Second Advent that believers will attain to their original and ultimate destiny by becoming like Christ. (1 John 3:2).

Purifying Hope. Living with the Advent Hope means to live with nothing to hide now, because there will be nothing hidden then. It means living with complete openness to God and to man, knowing that at the Parousia all masks will be removed and all secret things will be revealed. It

means to live in the consciousness of Christ's presence, so that at His Coming we will not shrink back in terror but step forward confidently into His nearer presence: "Abide in him, so that when he appears we may have confidence and not shrink from him in shame at his coming" (1 John 2:28).

The vision of God is the goal and aspiration of all true believers. However, in order to see God, we need the purity of heart that only God can give (Matt 5:8). John explains that the believer who hopes soon to see his Savior "purifies himself as he is pure" (1 John 3:2). Thus, the Blessed Hope has a purifying effect on our lives.

2. Revelation

Centrality of Second Advent. The Day of Christ's Coming constitutes the fundamental theme around which the whole book of Revelation revolves. The book is introduced as "the revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants *what must soon take place*" (Rev 1:1).⁹ After the dedication of the book to the seven churches of Asia Minor, John announces in unmistakable terms the nature of this revelation: "Behold, *He is coming with the clouds*,¹⁰ and every eye will see him" (Rev 1:7). The same announcement is found in the last chapter at the conclusion of the revelation received: "Behold, *I am coming soon*" (Rev 22:7, 12).¹¹

The focal point of every vision in Revelation is the Coming of Christ. The visions of the throne, the seven seals, the seven trumpets, the woman, the beast and the Lamb, the seven last plagues, the harlot and Babylon, the destruction of Satan and the establishment of the New Jerusalem, all describe events leading to or following the Coming of Christ.¹²

Various Descriptions. The Second Advent is pictured in Revelation in a variety of ways. In chapter 6, the Parousia is described as a terrifying experience for the wicked, who will call upon mountains and rocks to fall upon them and hide them "from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb" (vv. 15-16).

In chapter 14, the Coming of the Son of Man is represented by the figure of two harvests: the ingathering of the wheat and of the grapes (vv. 14-20). In chapter 19, the Second Coming is pictured as the coming of a Conqueror with the armies of heaven to gain victory over evil by the power of a sharp sword proceeding out of his mouth. His victory is gained not by military might but by the power of His word.

In chapter 20, the positive results of Christ's Coming are described. These involve first the establishment of a temporal kingdom when the

resurrected saints reign with Christ for a period of a thousand years (Rev 20:4), and then the ushering in of God's eternal kingdom with its new heaven and new earth (Rev 21:1-4).

Source of Comfort. The above examples show how fundamental for John was the hope of Christ's Coming. This hope was for him not an abstract theological belief, but a constant source of comfort while suffering in exile "on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus" (Rev 1:9).

Together with those "who had been slain for the word of God," John undoubtedly was crying, "O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before thou wilt judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell upon the earth?" (Rev 6:10). The vision of "standing before the throne and before the Lamb" (Rev 7:9) at the Parousia must have given to the aged and honored Apostle the strength to suffer patiently, confident that "on that great day of God" (Rev 16:14) right would be vindicated and wrong punished.

CONCLUSION

Prominent Teaching. The belief in the personal Return of Christ figures prominently in the New Testament. We have found that the Gospels report numerous sayings, two long speeches, and several parables of Christ dealing with His glorious Return. In these accounts, Christ presents His future Coming as glorious, visible, imminent, sudden, and personal.

The purpose of Christ's Coming is to vindicate His work universally, to gather all His followers and welcome them into His eternal Kingdom, and to destroy sin and evildoers and thus establish a new world order. Constant readiness for His Return is the keynote that Christ sounds repeatedly. This involves both spiritual preparation and social outreach to the needy.

Variety of Designations. The fundamental importance of Christ's Advent teaching is emphasized by such New Testament writers as Peter, Paul, James, and John. We have found that they all speak repeatedly and confidently of the certainty of Christ's Return. The event is described in a variety of ways such as a Day of Salvation, a Day of Judgment, a personal Arrival (Parousia), a terrifying destruction of the wicked and a vivifying, transforming experience of the believers.

A variety of imagery is used to describe Christ's Coming, such as lightning, clouds, trumpets, sharp sickle, harvest, and conquering horseman. These allusive symbols point to the unique and unparalleled nature of the Second Advent—an event that escapes human analogies because it has never

been witnessed by human beings. This may explain why Christ and the New Testament writers dwell more on the *why* than on the *how* of the Parousia.

Completion of Redemption. A fundamental reason emphasized in the New Testament for Christ's Return is to complete the redemptive work begun at His incarnation. Through His First Advent Christ revealed God's loving and saving purpose. Through His Second Advent He will bring God's saving purpose to completion.

The life, death, and resurrection of Christ inflicted a decisive defeat on Satan, thus rescuing men and women from the Devil's dominion and bringing them under His reign. But it is at His glorious Parousia that Christ will completely and permanently destroy every form of evil and death, resurrect or translate the believers, and inaugurate God's eternal Kingdom.

Goal of History. The Coming of the Son of Man is presented in the New Testament as the event that marks the climax and turning point of the present historical order. It represents God's final invasion into human history for the purpose of establishing a new order where love and justice prevail and where He will reign forever.

The New Testament views the Second Advent as a concrete, genuine event in which there will be a real reunion between a real Savior and a real multitude of redeemed persons. This will be a visible, public, and triumphant manifestation of the Lordship of Christ over this world—a Lordship which is not invisible and confessed by faith.

The certainty of this Advent Hope rests not on human insights or wishes for a better tomorrow, but on Christ's redemptive accomplishments, on His present ministry in the heavenly sanctuary on behalf of His people, and on the experience of His power and grace in the life of believers. This Blessed Hope has in the past been a source of comfort and motivation for moral and dynamic living to Christians, and is still today a source of encouragement and inspiration to believers called to live among the uncertainties and troubles of this present age.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 4

1. C. F. D. Moule emphasizes that the intention of the evangelists was to record for admittedly evangelistic purposes “the plain story of what happened in the ministry of Jesus” (“The Intention of the Evangelists,” in *New Testament Essays*, ed. A. J. B. Higgins [Grand Rapids, 1959], p. 176).

2. Other Advent sayings not discussed in this chapter are found in Matt 19:28; Luke 17:22; Matt 10:23; and especially Luke 18:18.

3. For a brief discussion of the various views see George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, 1974), pp. 197-198.

4. This view is developed by C. E. B. Cranfield, “St. Mark 13,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 6 (1953): 297-300.

5. Ralph Earle, *What the Bible Says About the Second Coming* (Grand Rapids, 1973), p. 27.

6. 1 Cor 15:23; 1 Thess 2:19; 3:13; 4:15; 5:23; 2 Thess 2:1, 8.

7. 2 Thess 2:8; 1 Tim 6:14; 2 Tim 4:1, 8; Titus 2:13.

8. Paul was undoubtedly influenced also by the Old Testament language of theophany. The Old Testament looks forward to the day when God will appear in His glory to judge and to establish His Kingdom (Is 2:12-22; 26:31; 35:4; 40:10; Zech 14:5).

9. Emphasis supplied.

10. Emphasis supplied.

11. Emphasis supplied.

12. Rev. 4:8; 6:10, 17; 11:15; 14:14; 16:15, 20; 19:7, 17; 21:11, 21; 22:7, 17.

Chapter 5

THE DELIMITATION OF THE ADVENT HOPE

One of the greatest desires cherished by many Christians through the centuries has been the desire to know the time of their Lord's Return. Like the disciples on the Mount of Olives, many have asked: "Tell us, when will this be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the close of the age?" (Matt 24:3).

The answers given by Christ and other Bible writers have been the subject of much inquiry. From the Montanists in the second century to some dispensationalists in the twentieth century, there have been Christians who have searched the Scriptures to find data by which to calculate the date of Christ's Return. In spite of the many disappointments of the past, the effort to forecast the time and chain of events leading to the glorious Coming of our Lord has hardly lost its momentum.

Books and movies speculating on the End are capturing the minds of millions today. This trend raises an important question: Did Christ or the apostles offer signs specific enough to enable believers to calculate the date of the Parousia and the End of the world? The question of the time-factor deserves careful investigation; thus in the next three chapters we will consider different aspects of it.

Objective of Chapter. The immediate concern of this chapter is to ascertain if Christ or Paul delimited the time of the Parousia to the lifetime of their generation. The chapter is divided into two parts: the first examines the "imminence statements" of Christ and the second part those of Paul. The result of this initial inquiry will provide the basis for examining in the next two chapters the tension between the imminence and distance of the Parousia and the function of the pre-Advent signs.

PART ONE**DID CHRIST DELIMIT THE TIME OF HIS RETURN?****1. An Error in Perspective?**

Mistaken Delimitation. Some scholars maintain that Christ not only predicted His imminent Return but also delimited its time to the lifetime of His generation.¹ For example, the Marburg New Testament scholar Werner George Kümmel explicitly affirms that Jesus emphasized the imminence of His Return “so concretely that he limited it to the lifetime of his hearers’ generation; . . . It is perfectly clear that this prediction of Jesus was not realized and it is therefore impossible to assert that Jesus was not mistaken about this.”²

The implication of this allegation is that Christ’s mistaken delimitation of His Return caused an “error in perspective” on the part of the apostles and early Christians who were misled to believe that the Parousia would occur within a few decades.³ When the expected Return did not materialize, early Christians allegedly were forced to cover up their disappointment by shifting their emphasis from the imminent end of the world to the long duration of the history of salvation.

Consistent Eschatology. This school of interpretation, commonly known as “consistent eschatology,” regards the New Testament Advent Hope as a mythical concept (wishful thinking) irrelevant to contemporary Christian living and to human destiny. Rudolf Bultmann exemplifies this view when he writes, “The mythical eschatology is untenable for the simple reason that the parousia of Christ never took place as the New Testament expected. History did not come to an end, and, as every schoolboy knows, it will continue to run its course.”⁴

The view just described rests primarily on certain statements of Christ and of Paul which are interpreted as delimiting the time of the Parousia to the apostolic generation. Thus it is important briefly to examine some of the most significant statements, first of Christ and then of Paul, to see if they indeed do delimit the time of the Second Advent.

Three Imminence Passages. The three noteworthy “imminence passages” of Christ are the following: (1) Mark 9:1 (parallel Matt 16:28; Luke 9:27); (2) Mark 13:30 (parallel Matt 24:34; Luke 21:32); (3) Matthew 10:23. No attempt can be made in this nontechnical study to discuss the authenticity of these passages which some have disputed. Numerous recent scholarly studies have argued cogently in favor of their basic genuineness.⁵ Our main concern is to ascertain if these sayings in their present form do indeed delimit the time of the Parousia.

2. Mark 9:1

The first noteworthy “imminence text” is Mark 9:1, which reads: “And he [Jesus] said to them, ‘Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God come with power.’” The parallel passage in Luke ends with the words, “before they see the kingdom of God” (Luke 9:27), and in Matthew “before they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom” (Matt 16:28).

Mistaken Prediction? At first sight it would appear that Jesus in this pronouncement is explicitly saying that His Second Advent would take place within the lifetime of at least some of His apostles. However, since Christ did not return, this interpretation would make the Lord guilty of misleading His followers through a mistaken prediction of His Parousia. The latter is indeed the view of the school of thought known as “consistent eschatology.”

To assume that Christ was mistaken in this prediction of His Return, which He prefaced by “Truly, I say to you,” means to question the trustworthiness of all His other less emphatic statement. Such a radical interpretation ignores Christ’s disavowal of the knowledge of the time of His Return (Mark 13:32, Matt 24:36). It would be hard to reconcile Christ’s admission of not knowing the time of His Return, and of the impossibility to calculate the time of the End through signs (Luke 17:20), with this interpretation which views Mark 9:1 as a rather exact delimitation of the Parousia.

Resurrection, Ascension? Other interpreters see the fulfillment of the coming of the kingdom of God with power in such events as the resurrection and ascension, the outpouring of the Spirit, the destruction of Jerusalem, and the powerful church growth and missionary work.⁶ All these interpretations fail to take the context into serious consideration.

In all three Gospels, Christ’s statement is immediately preceded by the Coming of the Son of man in glory (Mark 8:38; cf. Matt 16:27 Luke 9:26), and immediately followed by the account of the Transfiguration (Mark 9:2; cf. Matt 17:1; Luke 9:28). Thus the immediate context indicates that the *seeing* by “some” of “the Kingdom of God come with power” (Mark 9:1) is contextually linked to a *visible manifestation* of the glory and power of the Son of man both at the Parousia and the Transfiguration.

The *seeing* of “the kingdom of God come with power” is inseparably connected with the *visible* Coming in glory of the Son of man, as indicated by Matthew’s explicit fusion of the two: “they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom” (Matt 16:28). This future visible manifestation of the power and glory of the Son of man is presented in clear contrast to the present hiddenness and unassuming nature of Christ and of His kingdom (Mark 8:38; cf. 14:62).

This fact would exclude events such as the resurrection, the ascension, Pentecost, and the destruction of Jerusalem, since none of these unambiguously fulfills the *seeing* “the kingdom of God come with power.” Even the resurrection appearances, though witnessed by some of the disciples, can hardly be viewed as a type of the visible manifestation of the “glory” and “power” of the Parousia, because none of them are described as being exceptionally glorious.

Transfiguration. The immediate context clearly links the prediction of the seeing by some of “the kingdom of God come with power” (Mark 9:1) with the Transfiguration by means of the temporal clause “and after six days” (Mark 9:2). Besides this temporal connection noted by numerous exegetes, the story of the Transfiguration contains several significant overtones suggesting the glorious Coming of Christ.

The mention of the visible “transfiguration” of Christ before Peter, James, and John; the transformation of Christ’s garments into “glistening white”; the “cloud,” the “voice”—all these elements are suggestive of the glory of the Parousia. It would seem, as noted by G. H. Boobyer, that “the transfiguration prophesies the parousia in the sense that it is a portrayal of what Christ will be at that day, and is in some degree a miniature picture of the whole second advent scene.”⁷

This view of the Transfiguration as an anticipatory (proleptic) manifestation of the Parousia shares the same prophetic perspective observed in chapter 2. As the prophets sometimes describe imminent historical judgments in terms of the final Day of the Lord, so the immediate (“after six days”) glorious revelation of Christ experienced by “some” apostles represents a preliminary but real manifestation of the glorious Second Advent. We therefore conclude that Mark 9:1 and parallels provide no evidence for a specific time delimitation of the Parousia by Christ or by the early Church.

3. Mark 13:30

A second important “imminence passage” is found in Mark 13:30: “Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away before all these things take place.” This passage is identical to Matthew 24:34 and appears slightly differently in Luke: “This generation will not pass away till all has taken place” (Luke 21:32). For some this saying indicates that Christ promised to return within the lifetime of His generation.

Time or Certainty? In attempting to interpret this difficult passage, three things should be noticed. First, Christ’s concern in the whole discourse

is not to pinpoint the *time* of His Return, but rather to emphasize its *certainty*. The *uncertainty of the time* (“that day or that hour no one knows”—v. 32) is given in clear contrast to the *certainty of the event* (“Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away”—v. 31).

The inverted type of parallelism present in Mark 13:30-31 serves to emphasize *certainty* rather than *time*. The negative statement “this generation *will not pass away*” of v. 30 is counterbalanced by the positive statement “Heaven and earth *will pass away*” of v. 31. Similarly the positive statement “before all these things *take place*” of v. 30, is counterbalanced by the negative statement “but my words *will not pass away*” of v. 31.

The function of this construction is to emphasize a point by stating it twice in two different ways. In both cases the emphasis is not on “this generation” or on “heaven and earth” but on the fact that all the things predicted by Christ will “take place” because His words “will not pass away.” In other words the inverted parallelism emphasized *not the time* but *the certainty* of the fulfillment of all the predicted signs.

Second, it seems arbitrary to interpret, as some do, “all these things” as referring only to the signs pointing to the End (vv. 3 to 23) but not to those signs descriptive of the End itself (vv. 24 to 27). If that was Christ’s intent, He could easily have said, “before *some* of these things take place.”

The phrase “all these things” comes after the enumeration of the signs of the End, namely: false prophets (v. 6), wars (v. 7), earthquakes and famines (v. 8), worldwide Gospel proclamation (v. 10), persecution (vv. 12-13), destruction of Jerusalem (vv. 14-18), and the glorious Coming of the Son of Man (v. 26). This suggests that by “all these things” Jesus meant to include all the events enumerated before, including His Return.

This Generation. Third, the usage of the phrase “this generation” should be noticed. In the Synoptic Gospels this phrase is used with both a *temporal* and a *qualitative* connotation. For example, “this generation” is qualified as “adulterous” (Mark 8:38), “evil” (Matt 12:34; Luke 11:29), “faithless and perverse” (Matt 17:17). These qualifications suggest that Jesus uses the phrase “this generation” to denote *not exclusively* His contemporaries *but inclusively* evil, rebellious people in general.

This inclusive meaning is found in such passages as Matthew 23:25-36 where Christ is reported as saying: “all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of innocent Abel to the blood of Zechariah . . . all this will come upon this generation.” In this context “this generation” can hardly refer exclusively to the Jews living at the time of Jesus. First because the context

speaks not only of past sins (v. 35) but also of *future* sins: “Therefore I send you prophets and wise men and scribes, some of whom you *will kill* and crucify, and some you *will scourge* in your synagogues and persecute from town to town” (v. 34).⁸

Second, because it seems absurd that Jesus would teach that the Jews of His own generation would be held accountable for all the sins ever committed by the Jewish people. Against this background, then, “this generation” seems to refer not exclusively to the Jews of Christ’s time but inclusively to past, present, and future unbelieving, rebellious persons.

Generation Resurrected. This meaning is also implied in Matthew 12:41-42 where Jesus speaks of “the men of Ninevah” and “the queen of the South” who “will arise at the judgement with this generation and condemn it.” Since the final judgment is clearly associated with Christ’s Return (Matt 25:31-32), Jesus could hardly have taught that His contemporaries would be alive to witness all the signs of the End, including His Return and judgment, if He had predicted that His generation would arise on the day of judgment.

Obviously the same generation could not be both alive and resurrected on the day of Christ’s Coming. Observations such as these suggest that the phrase “this generation” is presumably used in Mark 13::30 with a *qualitative* rather than *temporal* connotation, meaning the evil and unbelieving people that would continue to exist until the time of Christ’s Return.

In the light of these considerations we conclude that by the statement “this generation will not pass away before all these things take place,” Jesus did not intend to delimit the time of His Return within the lifetime of His generation, but rather to emphasize its certainty. The time reference is *indefinite* (“this generation,” or “heaven and earth”) but the fact of His Return is *definite* (“all these things take place,” “my words will not pass away”).

4. Matthew 10:23

The third significant “imminence passage,” which has no parallel in the Synoptics, is found in Matthew 10:23. The text reads: “When they persecute you in one town, flee to the next; for truly, I say to you, you will not have gone through all the towns of Israel, before the Son of Man comes.”

Proclamation to the Jews. For some this verse sets the time of the Parousia. They interpret the words, “you will not have gone through all the towns of Israel,” as referring either to the immediate preaching tour described in Matthew 10 or to the later apostolic proclamation to the Jews. The phrase “before the Son of Man comes” is understood as referring to the Parousia.

The conclusion drawn by some is that Jesus in this passage sets the date for His Return either by the end of the short preaching tour of His disciples or before the completion of the longer messianic proclamation to the Jews during the lifetime of the apostles. Since the Parousia did not occur as predicted, these scholars view Matthew or Christ as responsible for a mistaken prediction.

Larger Context. To determine the meaning of this difficult text, at least three things should be noticed. First, the larger context of Matthew 10:23 contains composite information. The chapter opens with the calling of the Twelve (vv. 1-4), and is followed by the disciples' commission to go only "to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (vv. 5-15). Presumably this refers to the short preaching tour of the Twelve during Jesus' own ministry.

The next section (vv. 16-23) describes the wider missionary activity in the face of persecution: "you will be dragged before governors and kings for my sake, to bear testimony before them and the Gentiles." The rest of the chapter develops further the theme of witnessing under persecution (vv. 24-42). Thus the larger context indicates that the passage under consideration is part of a series of admonitions regarding the mission of the disciples not merely to the Jews but to both Jews and Gentiles.

Immediate Context. Second, attention must be given to the immediate context of v. 23, namely, verses 16 to 22. These verses describe the persecution to be expected in bearing witness for Christ before the Jews ("councils, synagogues"—v. 17) and the "Gentiles" ("governors, kings"—v. 18). It is in this context that verse 23 offers a word of *advice* and a word of *encouragement*.

The *advice* is part of the missionary strategy outlined earlier (v. 14): "When they persecute you in one town, flee to the next" (v. 23a). Christ followed this principle repeatedly during His own ministry (Matt 4:12; 15:21; 16:1-13; Luke 4:30, 31). The *encouragement* is given in the form of an assurance: "you will not have gone through all the towns of Israel, before the Son of man comes" (v. 23b).

The purpose of this word of encouragement is not to delimit the time of the Parousia, but simply to assure the disciples that their mission will be able to continue until the Coming of Christ. The delimitation is not *chronological* but *conceptual*. It does not say, "you will not finish this mission *before the year 'X'* when the Son of man comes." What it does say is: "you will not finish the mission *until (eos an)* the Son of man comes." The time reference is left indefinite. As aptly stated by George E. Ladd, "The present verse says no more than that the mission of Jesus' disciples to Israel will last until the coming of the Son of Man."⁹

Towns of Israel. Third, it is important to define the meaning of the phrase “going through the towns of Israel.” This expression cannot be taken literally as referring exclusively to the apostolic mission to Palestinian Jews. First, because the term “Israel” was used in the time of Christ to designate not a geographic or political entity but the Jewish people as a whole (Acts 2:14, 22; Matt 8:10). As Acts 2 indicates, the Jews were found in “every nation under heaven” (v. 5). Thus the phrase “towns of Israel” is presumably an idiomatic expression meaning the world where the Jews lived.

Second, because the immediate context suggests a wider meaning. The “towns of Israel” are mentioned in the immediate context of the mission to the Gentiles (vv. 18-22). If Christ had taught that He would return before the completion of the mission exclusively to the Jews, there would have been no point in commissioning His disciples to go to the Gentiles, since they would not even have had time to begin such a mission. Thus, the immediate context demands that “going through all the towns of Israel” be understood as representing the total mission of the disciples, who, as representative of the entire church, must continue to preach the Gospel wherever people live until Jesus returns.

Priority of Jewish Mission. The specific mention of the “towns of Israel” appears to be motivated in Matthew by the priority given to the mission to the Jews (Matt 10:6). Such a priority, however, does not preclude the mission to the Gentiles. The latter is indicated in the immediate context where the commission is given to witness before both Jewish (“councils, synagogues”—v. 17) and Gentile (“governors, kings”—v. 18) centers of authority.

In the light of these observations, Matthew 10:23, when interpreted in the light of its immediate and larger setting, does not delimit the time of the Parousia but simply affirms that the mission of Christ’s disciples is to continue until His Return.

Conclusion. The brief analysis of the three noteworthy “imminence passages” has shown that the intent of these sayings is not to delimit the time of Christ’s Return within the apostolic generation, but rather to emphasize the *certainty* of the Event. The question of the time of the Parousia is left indefinite.

At this point one may ask, What about the rest of the New Testament? Do any of its writers make statements which delimit the time of the expected Coming of the Lord? Some scholars find in the writings of Paul, Peter, James, and John indications of time-delimitations of the Advent Hope. An examination of all the passages in question would take us well beyond the limited scope of the present study. Thus we shall limit our attention to the most prominent passages which are found in the writings of Paul.

PART TWO**DID PAUL DELIMIT THE TIME OF THE PAROUSIA?****1. “We Passages”**

Several Pauline statements are interpreted by some as indicating a time-delimitation of the Parousia. The most noteworthy of such statements are the so-called “we passages” found in 1 Thessalonians 4:15,17 and 1 Corinthians 15:51-52.

Paul’s Lifetime? In his first letter to the Thessalonians, Paul twice uses the first person plural “we” when referring to those who will 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, 17). A similar usage of the first person plural is found in 1 Corinthians: “Lo! I tell you a mystery. *We* shall not all sleep, but *we* shall all be changed: (1 Cor 15:51,52). Some interpreters claim these statements indicate that Paul taught that Christ would definitely return within his own lifetime or at least the lifetime of some of his hearers.¹⁰ This conclusion fails to take into serious account at least four significant facts.

Who or What? In the first place, Paul’s concern in the Thessalonians passage is to relieve the anxiety of some over the status of those who had fallen asleep before the day of the Parousia (1 Thess 4:13). To these worried believers the Apostle explains that living Christians (“we who are alive”) on that day will have no advantage over “those who have fallen asleep” (v. 15).

The contrast between the two groups is rather impersonal. The “we” represents not a specific group, namely, exclusively the Thessalonians and Paul, but inclusively Christians in general who will be alive at the Parousia. The emphasis in the passage is *not on who* comprises each group *but on what* will happen to each group.

Generic Usage. Second, the use of the first person plural in 1 Corinthians 15:51,52 (“*We* shall not all sleep, but *we* shall all be changed”) is hardly intended to express Paul’s certainty to be among those who will not die. The Apostle’s concern is not to fix a definite date for the resurrection event, but to reveal a secret (“a mystery”—v. 51), namely, that those alive at the Parousia will experience the transformation from mortality to immortality without first seeing death.

The “*we*” in 1 Corinthians 15, as in 1 Thessalonians 4:15, 17, means not exclusively Paul and some of his contemporary Corinthian believers, but Christians generally. To insist on taking this expression literally would oblige us to do the same in 1 Corinthians 6:14, which reads “God raised the Lord and

will also raise us by his power” (cf. Phil 3:11). Literal consistency would demand that in the former passage Paul expected to be alive at the Parousia while in the latter to be dead.

This apparent contradiction is resolved by recognizing the generic usage of the first person plural. This usage is determined on the one hand by Paul’s hope for an imminent Parousia and thus for the possibility of being alive to witness it; and, on the other hand, by his awareness of a possible longer waiting time and thus the possibility of being dead. The fact that Paul could use the first person plural to refer to both possible experiences indicates that he did not intend by its usage to delimit the approximate time of Christ’s Coming.

Alive or Asleep? Third, the time aspect of Christ’s Return is not discussed in either passage. In 1 Thessalonians Paul does mention, immediately after the “we” passage, “the times and the season” (5:1) of the Parousia. However, he chooses to emphasize not its approximate date but rather its suddenness (“like a thief in the night”—5:2) and consequently the necessity to watch and be temperate (5:4-8).

Moreover, a few verses later Paul again uses the “we,” but this time to express the hope that “whether we wake or sleep we might live with him” (1 Thess 5:10). This statement indicates that the Apostle did entertain the hope that he and his readers might live to witness the Parousia but at the same time he did not exclude the possibility that they might die before its occurrence. This verse, like other passages, expresses the hope of an imminent Parousia without however pinpointing a definite time-period. The same dual possibility of being alive or asleep on the day of Christ’s Coming is expressed by Paul in other places such as 2 Corinthians 5:9 (“whether we are at home or away”) and Philippians 1:20 (“whether by life or by death”).

Hope of Knowledge? Fourth, it is important to distinguish between what Paul hoped for and what he objectively knew and taught regarding the date of Christ’s Return. That Paul ardently hoped for an imminent Parousia, possibly during his lifetime, is unquestionable. This is suggested not only by the “we passages,” but also by his counsel to the unmarried to remain single because “the form of this world is passing away” (1 Cor 7:31).

The fact, however, that Paul hoped for an imminent Return of Christ does not mean that he took the liberty of translating such a hope into a definite time schedule for the occurrence of such an event. On the contrary, in his main reference to the question of the time, Paul reiterates the indeterminacy of the date of the Parousia, saying: “But as to the times and the seasons, brethren,

you have no need to have anything written to you. For you yourselves know well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night” (1 Thess 5:1-2).

The expression “thief in the night” was used by Christ to emphasize the unexpected and indefinite time of His Return. By referring to this familiar expression, Paul reiterates the well-known fact (“you yourselves know”—1 Thess 5:2) of the indeterminacy of the time of the Parousia.

The same note is sounded in 1 Timothy 6:14-15 where the Apostle charges Timothy to be faithful “until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ and this will be made manifest at the proper time.” By “the proper time” Paul obviously means “the time determined by God,” which is unknown to human beings.

The conclusion that emerges from this study of the Pauline “we passages” is that there is no evidence the Apostle held to and taught a delimited time for the fulfillment of the Advent Hope. His primary concern was to explain how believers, whether living or dead, will equally share in the experience of Christ’s Coming.

CONCLUSION

The discussion of this chapter has been somewhat negative, necessitated as it was by the need to examine the alleged New Testament delimitation of the Parousia. Our analysis of the noteworthy “imminence passages” of Jesus and of Paul indicates that such passages view the Second Advent as imminent but no attempt is made to define the imminence in terms of a specific time-period.

In Christ’s three “imminence texts” the emphasis is not on the time-factor of His Return—which is left indefinite—but rather on the certainty of the event. Similarly, the Pauline concern in the “we passages” is not to delimit the time of the Second Advent, but rather to explain how believers, whether living or dead, will share equally in the experience of Christ’s Coming.

Paul does express the hope that he and some of his hearers might be alive to experience the Parousia, but he makes no attempt to translate his hope into terms of months or years, because what mattered to him was not the time but the assurance to meet the Lord whether awake or asleep (1 Thess 5:10).

We shall see in the next chapter that the emphasis on the imminence of the Second Advent is balanced in the New Testament by passages suggesting a possibly long waiting time. We now turn to the study of this tension between imminence and distance in an effort to better understand the New Testament teaching regarding the time-aspect of the Advent Hope.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 5

1. Albert Schweitzer is generally regarded as the pioneer of the so-called “delay of the Parousia” view. He articulated this view in his book *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, first published in 1906. His view came to be known as “consistent eschatology.” For an illuminating discussion of this school of thought, see G. C. Berkouwer, *The Return of Christ* (Grand Rapids, 1972), pp. 65-95; also N. H. Ridderbos, *The Coming of the Kingdom* (Philadelphia, 1962), pp. 444-527.

2. Werner G. Kümmel, *Promise and Fulfillment* (Naperville, 1957), p. 149.

3. The phrase is used by Oscar Cullman, *Christ and Time* (Philadelphia, 1950), p. 87.

4. Rudolf Bultmann, “New Testament and Mythology,” in *Kerygma and Myth*, ed. H. W. Bartsch (London, 1953), vol. 1, p. 5.

5. For a discussion see A. L. Moore, *The Parousia in the New Testament* (Leiden, 1966), pp. 176-189.

6. For a brief discussion of the supporters of the various views see Anthony A. Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future* (Grand Rapids, 1979), pp. 113-114.

7. G. H. Boobyer, *St. Mark and the Transfiguration Story* (Edinburgh, 1942), p. 87.

8. Emphasis supplied.

9. George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, 1974), p. 200.

10. For a bibliographic listing of the exponents of this view, see A. L. Moore, *The Parousia in the New Testament* (Leiden, 1966), p. 109, note 7.

Chapter 6

THE IMMINENCE AND DISTANCE OF THE ADVENT HOPE

I stood on a platform of Rome's railway station waiting to catch the 2:30 p. m. express train for Florence. As the scheduled time arrived and passed, I found myself nervously shifting my eyes from the watch to the railroad tracks hoping to catch a distant glimpse of the expected train, but no train was in sight. How much longer would I have to wait? Half an hour? One hour? Why is the train delayed? Is it because of a mechanical malfunction, a power failure, or perhaps a sudden strike, not uncommon in Italy?

For almost two millennia now, many earnest Christians have agonized over a different type of "delay": the apparent delay in the Return of their Lord. They have prayed: "Come, Lord Jesus!" (Rev 22:20). When the pain and problems of this present life seemed unbearable, 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 of the imminent Return of Christ? As the twenty-first century approaches, is it really rationally possible to believe and live in the expectation of the imminent Second Advent?

Objective of Chapter. This chapter will attempt to answer some of these vital questions by examining the overall Biblical teaching regarding the *time element* of the Parousia. A correct understanding of the time of the Advent can save believers from misguided hopes and expectations.

The specific objective of this chapter is twofold. First, to verify how the tension between the imminence and distance of the Advent Hope is expressed in the Old and New Testaments. Second, to consider some possible solutions to the imminence/distance tension.

PART ONE

IMMINENCE/DISTANCE OF THE ADVENT

I. Imminence/Distance of the Advent in the Old Testament

In the New Testament the expectation of the Second Advent is expressed in two different, seemingly contradictory perspectives: *imminence* and *distance*. The tension between these two perspectives has caused considerable confusion and has given rise to divergent schools of thought regarding the Parousia. Let us note first of all how this tension is already present in the Old Testament.

Amos, one of the earliest prophets, announces the day of the Lord (Amos 5:18-20) in the context of imminent divine judgments 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 judgment (Amos 7:4; 8:8-9; 9:5), and a day of salvation and restoration (Amos 9:13-15).

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 judgment, Zephaniah urges the people to wait 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 judgment but also salvation both for the Gentiles and for Israel (Zeph 3:9-20).

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 13:6).² In the context of this impending historical judgment, 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 by Isaiah and other prophets by indefinite phrases such as “in

the latter days,” “in that day,” “afterwards” (Is 2:2, 20; cf. Hos 3:5; Ezek 38:16; Jer 30:8; Joel 2:28-29).

II. Imminence and Distance of the Advent in the New Testament

1. Imminence

The tension between the imminent expectation and the future realization of the Advent Hope is found even more explicitly in the New Testament. Besides the “imminence passages” examined in the previous chapter, numerous other verses underline the *imminence* of Christ’s Return. We shall mention only a few noteworthy examples. To the Romans Paul writes: “For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed; the night is far gone, *the day is at hand*: (Rom 13:11-12; cf. 1 Cor 7:29; Phil 4:5).³

James admonishes believers to “be patient” and not to grumble “for the coming of the *Lord is at hand* . . . the Judge is standing *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; cf. Heb 10:25). 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).⁴

2. Distance

Sayings. Accompanying these “imminence verses” there are other passages which place the Parousia 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 of the kingdom 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, and increased wickedness. Distance is particularly emphasized by the statement that even after the fulfillment of these conditions “the end is not yet” (Mark 13:7; Matt 24:6).

Parables. Several of Christ’s parables point to a long waiting time between His death and His Return. Matthew links the Olivet discourse directly with the parables of the faithful and the unfaithful servants, the Ten Virgins, and the Talents, which all suggest the elapsing of considerable time

before the Lord's Return. The unfaithful servant said: "My master *is delayed*" (Matt 24:48) and began living immorally and intemperately.⁵ The master rebuked 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). 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).⁶

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.

A similar point is made in the parable of the Faithful and Wise Steward (Luke 12:41-48). The unfaithful servant's statement: "My master *is delayed* in coming" (v. 45) implies that there will indeed be a "*delay*" which will differentiate between the faithful and the unfaithful stewards.

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

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

Paul. The same tension between imminence and distance is found in Paul's writings. We noted earlier that in Romans 13:12 the Apostle speaks of the nearness of the end ("the night is far gone, the day is at hand"). Yet in the preceding chapters (9 to 11) Paul describes how the ingathering of the Gentiles will 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.

Revelation. 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 long waiting before the Parousia. The martyrs cry: “O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, *how long* before thou wilt judge and avenge our blood?” (Rev 6:10).⁷ 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).

This 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*.

PART TWO

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

How can this tension between the *imminence* and *distance* of the Advent Hope be resolved? The problem is not only *hermeneutical*, that is, how to interpret apparently 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.

1. A Crisis of Faith

Some scholars explain the imminence/distance Advent-tension as being the result of a crisis of faith experienced by first-century Christians. This crisis was 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.⁸

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 Advent Hope.

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 due to Christ’s failure to return before the passing away of the apostolic generation.

No Crisis of Faith. A crisis of the Advent Hope is to be expected if such hope is based upon the presumption of knowing the date of the Second Advent, rather than on the experience of salvation already provided by Christ’s First Advent. The New Testament Church was reconciled to a possibly long waiting time, because she was already experiencing the “first fruits” (Rom 8:23) of the 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 in the New Testament Church of a crisis of faith regarding the Parousia. The Advent Hope of the earliest Christians was not shaken by any perception of an apparent “delay,” because, as Paul eloquently puts 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).

2. The Existential Time of the Advent Hope

Empirical Versus Existential Time. Distinguishing between two notions of time can help us resolve the New Testament tension between the imminence and distance of Christ’s Return. The first notion is *empirical time* which is measured by the clock. This is the common notion of time. 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.

The second notion of time is *existential time* or perhaps “*lover’s time*.” This 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 and hope 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).⁹

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. This tension vanishes when the event expected is the Return of a beloved Person. "Beloved," write John, "we are God's children now; it does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is" (1 John 3:2). The Advent is the occasion to see "face to face" the One whom now "we see in a mirror dimly" (1 Cor 13:12).

Measuring Time by Faith. The Christian eagerly awaits not an impersonal happening, but rather the Return of his beloved Lord. This faith enables the believer to live in the expectation of the imminent Coming of the Lord while conscious at the same time of 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.

When I left my fiancée in Italy to come to the USA for my seminary training, we bade farewell to one another saying: "Time is going to pass quickly. Soon we are going to be together again." We knew that we would be separated for at least a year, but we were measuring time not by the calendar, but rather by our love and faith. Since our lives were illuminated by the certainty of our future reunion, 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 Advent Hope. When a love relationship exists between the believer and Christ, living in the joyful expectation of 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 (Titus 2:13).

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 before His Return as "a little while" (*mikron*), Christ was not giving His disciples some kind of time measurement to calculate the date of His Return, 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 consists of only a few years, but because during His absence we can live intensively in the reality of His love and the certainty of His Return. A short waiting time may seem like an eternity when one lives in the fear of 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.

3. The Unity of the Advent Hope

A second important concept which helps us to resolve the imminence-distance tension of the Parousia is the essential unity which exists in the New Testament between the First and the Second Advents. This unity is expressed in several significant ways.

One way already noticed is the dual meaning attached to the three terms *Parousia*, *Revelation*, and *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 intensely 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.” Today, when we hear the expression “the end of the age” (Heb 9:26), we generally think not of the Incarnation but of the Parousia. In the New Testament, however, “the end of the age” is the age inaugurated by Christ when He came the first time “to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself” (Heb 9:26). Such age is also referred to as “the last days” (Acts 2:17), or “the end of times” (1 Pet 1:20). Christ inaugurated this final age by offering to believers the down payment of their future Advent inheritance.

The Second Advent is near because the believer already enjoys a foretaste of the blessings and privileges of the End-time. 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).¹⁰ 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.”¹¹

The Lord’s Supper. The unity of the Advent Hope is expressed 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 Parousia. 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 9:24-28).¹²

4. Moral Urgency of the Advent Hope

A third important reconciling clue is the ethical purpose of the nearness-remoteness 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 would tempt some to postpone to tomorrow the preparation that should be done today.

Preparation, not Calculation. The tension between imminence and distance fulfills a vital ethical function. It discourages date-setting and it calls for constant watchfulness and readiness. In the famous Olivet Discourse we find two distinct emphases: *nearness* and *remoteness*. *Nearness* is suggested by the significance of the given signs, namely, “that he is near, at the very gates” (Mark 13:29). *Remoteness* is indicated by the time needed for the signs 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 speculation and 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: "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, not speculation.

The generic nature of the Advent signs provides another indication. Earthquakes, famines, political conflicts, and worldwide Gospel preaching are the kind of signs which can hardly be used to date the particular moment in history when Christ will come. They characterize the conditions existing between the First and the Second Advent. Their purpose, as the next chapter will show, 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.

Constant Readiness. It is important to recognize the close link between the predictions of the Advent and the ethical concerns of Jesus and the New Testament writers. Like the Old Testament prophets, New Testament writers speak of nearness and delay, 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. By contrast, 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. By discouraging date-setting, this tension challenges believers to constant readiness and to experience in the present the certainty of the future Coming of the Lord.

5. The Prophetic Perspective of the Advent Hope

A fourth significant concept 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 already noted, 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 present divine interventions were seen as an anticipation of the final divine visitation. Each judgment 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 New Testament teaching. 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. 24-27). The first event is viewed as an anticipation of the final judgment to take place at the Parousia. As noted earlier, in Mark 9:1-3 the immediate (“after six days”—v. 2) glorious Transfiguration of Christ, is viewed as an anticipatory manifestation of the coming Kingdom.

What or When? It is difficult for us—trained to measure time *quantitatively* rather than *qualitatively*—to appreciate the prophetic perspective.¹³ 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, the important question is often 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*” 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,*” that will characterize the waiting time.

The characteristic is essentially 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 of God (Mark 13:10; Matt 24:14). 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 enables a person to maintain the present and future, 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 are led to ignore the present outworking of God's Kingdom in favor of speculations regarding dates and events related to the Day 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 to bring His Kingdom to its consummation on the Day of His Parousia.

CONCLUSION

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 it is an essential component of the Biblical Advent Hope.

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

At this juncture some questions arise: What are the specific functions of the Advent signs? How do they relate the imminence/distance tension we have discussed? Do the Advent signs point to the "nearness" of the Second Advent merely in terms of existential certainty or also in terms of temporal closeness? These are some of the important questions to be considered in the next four chapters.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 6

1. Emphasis supplied.
2. Emphasis supplied.
3. Emphasis supplied.
4. All the emphasis in the paragraph is supplied.
5. Emphasis supplied.
6. All the emphasis in the paragraph is supplied.
7. Emphasis supplied.
8. An insightful discussion of this view is found in G. C. Berkouwer, *The Return of Christ* (Grand Rapids, 1972), pp. 65-95.
9. Emphasis supplied
10. Emphasis supplied.
11. Paul S. Minear, *Christian Hope and the Second Coming* (Philadelphia, 1954), p. 100.
12. C. E. B. Cranfield acknowledges the relationship between the nearness of the End and the unity in Christ's acts: "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. The foreshortening, by which the Old Testament sees as one divine intervention in the future that which from the viewpoint of the New Testament writers is both past and future, is not only a visual illusion; for the distance actually brings out an essential unity, which is not so apparent from a position in between the Ascension and the Parousia" ("St. Mark 13," *Scottish Journal of Theology*, VI [1953], p. 288.
13. Emphasis supplied.

Chapter 7

THE NATURE AND 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. Christ was cognizant of the need for signs which could nourish our hope while awaiting His Return. In His Olivet Discourse, the longest reported by the Synoptics, Christ gave several specific signs foreshadowing His Return. Several New Testament writers also speak of certain events that till preceded the Second Advent. We shall often refer to these as "Advent signs."

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 Hal Lindsey, have studied the Advent signs to pinpoint God's specific timetable of events leading to Christ's Return. For example, Lindsey finds in Christ's reference to the budding of the fig tree (Matt 24:32-35) the time clue to calculate the approximate year of the Second Advent, namely, by 1988.¹

Objective of Chapter. The attempts which have been made by well-meaning Christians 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 this chapter where we shall examine first the nature of the Advent signs and then their function. This investigation is designed to foster a legitimate use and appreciation for the precursory signs of Christ's Return.

PART ONE

THE NATURE OF THE ADVENT SIGNS

1. 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, and 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.”

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.

2. Contemporary Application of 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, 26, 33, 42).²

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.

3. Contemporary Recognition of Advent Signs

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 say 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 perceived in the contemporary arising of antichrists, that is false teachers who denied the messiahship and the incarnation of Christ (1 John 4:2-3), 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 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 4:8).

Christian Centuries. Throughout the centuries there have been Christians who, like Paul, Peter, John, and James, have seen in certain contemporary happenings precursory signs heralding the Return of Christ. Luther, for example, worked hastily in 1530 to complete his German Bible translation because he feared that Christ would return before the completion of his work. “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 the 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.”³

4. Different Perceptions of the Advent Signs

The above sampling of testimonies indicates that though many Christians have shared 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 or, later on, Luther, you or me.

Past Disappointments. Some may question the legitimacy of contemporizing the signs of the Parousia because such efforts have proved

disappointing in the past. Unquestionably, there have been in the past misguided attempts to calculate the date of the Parousia on the basis of imaginative prophetic interpretations of contemporary happenings. Such sensational predictions have undermined the faith in the Advent Hope and have encouraged skepticism about the reality of Christ's Coming

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 Second Coming of the Lord can only remain a living expectation if they are sustained by reassuring signs.

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"?

5. 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 will be shown in the next three chapters, 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 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 second part of this chapter four vital functions of the Advent signs.

PART TWO

THE FUNCTION OF THE ADVENT SIGNS

1. 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 amount 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 judgment. 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.

2. 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 that I am 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 to 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).⁴

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.

3. Advent Signs Call for Constant Readiness

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, or 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. 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.⁵

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 on the basis of this prophecy the actual time of the coming of the Messiah. 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.⁶

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. An important principle to remember is 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?"⁷

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 to point to the certainty of Christ's Return and to the need for constant readiness, but rather to pinpoint God's specific timetable of events leading to and following the Second Advent.

In an interview reported in *Christianity Today* (April 1977), Ward Gasque asked Hal Lindsey regarding his prediction that Christ would return by 1988, "But what if you're wrong?" Lindsey replied: "Well, there is just a split second's difference between a hero and a bum. I did not 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."⁸

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 to pick up the pieces of their disillusionment and to come to a true understanding of Biblical prophecy.

Constant Preparation, not Prognostications. 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 to be always ready for that 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, 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.”⁹ 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 that foster a false sense of superiority and security.

4. Advent Signs Reveal the Ongoing Cosmic Controversy

A fourth vital function of the Advent signs is to bear witness to the ongoing cosmic controversy between the forces of Christ and those of Satan. In the parable of the tares Jesus explained that weed and wheat will grow side by side until harvest time at the end of the world (Matt 13:24-30).

The conflict between divine and satanic forces will continue throughout mankind’s history. The Advent signs bear witness to this ongoing conflict. 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 anti-Christian ideologies, military conflicts among nations, growth of lawlessness, and 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 things, such as earthquakes, tornados, floods, famines, and pestilences (Mark 13:8; Luke 21:11), reveal God's judgment upon human wickedness. They are harbingers of the final divine judgment to come. The Advent signs, then, tell us that there is a cosmic conflict going on 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 plan of salvation. 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 amount of signs. Christ rebuked such people for failing to discern the signs of the times (Matt 16:3; Mark 8:11). To them the signs only serve 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, and lives changed by the power of the Gospel, they are led to search for meaning and find hope.

Many people 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, signs have led to reflection, to a change of behavior and to commitment to the Lord. Signs fulfill 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 to wait eagerly 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 the nature and function of the Advent signs. We have found that their nature is of a generic kind, designed to discourage date-setting sensationalism and to encourage constant preparation. The function of the Advent signs is fourfold,

First, they serve to nourish the hope and strengthen the faith of believers in every generation.

Second, they point believers constantly forward to the consummation of redemption to be realized by the Coming of the Lord.

Third, they encourage, not calculation or prognostication, but constant preparation and watchfulness.

Lastly, they reveal the ongoing controversy between the Kingdom of God and the powers of evil. This revelation summons believers to wait eagerly for the Coming of the Lord who will bring the conflict to an end.

Some of the questions left unanswered in this chapter are: How are the Advent signs fulfilled in our time? Which signs tell us today that “the coming of the Lord is at hand . . . at the doors” (James 5:8-9)? These questions will now be examined in the following three chapters.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 7

1. Lindsey believes that the parable of the fig tree contains “an extremely important time clue” 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, which he interprets to mean 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.” By interpreting “this generation” of Matthew 24:34 as being “the generation which sees Israel (the ‘fig tree’ of verse 32) back in the land of Palestine,” Lindsey predicted in 1970 that “within forty year or so of 1948, all these things could take place” (*The Late Great Planet Earth* [Grand Rapids, 1970], pp. 53-54; W. Ward Gasque, “Future Fact? Future Fiction?” *Christianity Today* 21 [April 15, 1977], p. 40).

2. Emphasis supplied.

3. Cited in T. F. Torrance, *Kingdom and Church* (Edinburgh and London, 1956), p. 20.

4. Some Christians clearly believe that the function of the Advent signs is to pinpoint our position in time with reference to Christ’s Return. For example, David Wilkerson writes “Christians rejoice because all the bad news is a series of signposts clearly marked out on their road map to eternity. Each terrifying event more clearly pinpoints out position down the home-stretch” (*Racing Toward Judgment* [New York, 1976], p. 138).

5. See, for example, Matt 1:23, 2:6, 18; 4:4, 6, 15; 11:10; 12:18-19; 13:14-15, 35; 21:5.

6. For a scholarly and comprehensive study on the ancient Jewish attempt 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), pp. 201ff.

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

8. W. Ward Gasque (n. 1), p. 40.

9. Robert Jewett rightly points out that “genuine living is response to the unexpected. The parables of Jesus teach an expectant aliveness, a readiness to live intensely in the now, while giving up all our efforts to control tomorrow” (*Jesus Against the Rapture. Seven Unexpected Prophecies* [Philadelphia, 1979], p. 30).

Chapter 8

THE SIGN OF DIVINE GRACE AND THE ADVENT HOPE

Most people like to believe that their country, their life style, their achievements, their religion, their family, and the age in which they live are unique and unparalleled. To possess a custom-built automobile or an architect-designed house, or unique clothes, some persons are willing to pay a fortune. The desire for uniqueness applies to religious beliefs as well, especially to the interpretation of the Advent signs. The result of the latter is often a sensational but senseless application of End-time prophecies to specific events of our time.

Objective of Chapter. This chapter will first of all establish the legitimacy of contemporizing the Advent signs in spite of mistaken and misguided efforts. Second, an investigation will be made of the unique fulfillment in our time of *the sign of divine grace*, manifested in the worldwide evangelization which has taken place in an unprecedented way in our century. The following two chapters will consider, first, the signs of opposition to God, and second, the signs of divine judgment.

The conclusion that will emerge from these three chapters is that we are witnessing today a quantitative and qualitative intensification of significant Advent signs. The purpose of this study is not to prognosticate a presumable date of Christ's Return, but rather to strengthen our confidence in the certainty of His imminent Coming. "When you see these things taking place," Jesus said, "you know that he is near, at the very gates" (Mark 13:29).

PART ONE

CONTEMPORIZING THE ADVENT SIGNS

1. The Danger of Sensationalism

Contemporary Happenings. We noted in the previous chapter that in every age there have been Christians who have believed they were witnessing in their time a unique fulfillment of the Advent signs. The same conviction

prevails today. Among some evangelical Christians there is a widespread belief that certain contemporary development such as the establishment of the State of Israel, the phenomenal rise of the Soviet Union, the formation of the United Nations, and of the European Economic Community are unique, unprecedented Biblical signs of the soon-Coming of Christ.

A visit to a Christian Bookstore will suffice to confirm how extensive this belief is. Some of the best sellers carry titles such as *The Late Great Planet Earth*, *Armageddon Now*, *Terminal Generation*, *Is this the Last Century?*, *Racing Toward Judgment*, and *WW III: Signs of the Impending Battle of Armageddon*.

Ridicule of Advent Hope. Unfortunately, these and similar popular books have exposed to ridicule the Advent Hope, through their fanciful prognostications which most often are based on gratuitous application of Biblical prophecies to current events. These efforts have led some critics to challenge the whole notion of a contemporary fulfillment of the Advent signs.

Critics maintain that the present signs of the times are no more unique than the signs witnessed by believers of past generation. Thus they regard as arbitrary and inappropriate any attempt to interpret present social, political, or scientific developments as unique harbingers of the soon-Return of our Lord.

2. Reasons for Studying the Advent Signs

It must be acknowledged that the determination of what constitutes a unique fulfillment of the Advent signs is largely tied to the perception of believers. As noted in the previous chapter, Paul, Peter, James, and John interpreted different religious, political, and social developments of their time as being significant signs of the imminent Parousia.

The fact that believers of past generations have seen in certain developments of their times the fulfillment of significant precursory Advent signs does not negate the right of believers today to view certain contemporary developments as climactic signs of the soon-Coming Lord. The reasons are at least three.

Constant Fulfillment. In the first place, as shown in the previous chapter, the precursory signs of the Second Advent are designed to be witnessed to some degree in every generation in order to constantly nourish the Advent Hope in the hearts of believers. Today, like yesterday, believers can gain from their perception of the unique fulfillment of the Advent signs the needed assurance that “the strife will not be long; this day the noise of battle, the next the victor’s song.”

Progression toward Consummation. A second reason is to be found in the Biblical view of history as progression toward its consummation at the day of Christ's Coming. This sense of Progression implies that every passing day brings us one day closer to the Return of Christ. This means, as Paul puts it, that "salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed; the night is far gone, the day is at hand" (Rom 13:11-12). This belief that every passing day brings us closer to the Day of Christ's Return justifies our effort to look for the fulfillment of the precursory signs of His Return.

Intensification. A third reason is offered by the Biblical teaching regarding the intensification of the conflict between satanic and divine forces as the End draws near. This intensification is to become manifest in heightened tension in the political, physical, social, and religious world. Thus we feel justified in looking for an intensification of the Advent signs in our time.

PART TWO

WORLDWIDE EVANGELIZATION

1. A Most Important Sign

An Ignored Sign. Studies of the Advent signs generally center on the darker side of eschatological events: wars, earthquakes, famines, pestilences, apostasy, antichrists, and tribulation. The brighter sign of the evangelization of the world is often totally ignored or at best briefly mentioned.

Hal Lindsey, for example, in his book *The Late Great Planet Earth*, gives no consideration to this important sign. The same is true of numerous other authors who, like Lindsey, arbitrarily use the Bible as a crystal ball to make sensational forecasts of events to take place in this generation before the Return of Christ. The sign of world evangelization is generally ignored because it does not provide a clear basis for sensational prognostications.

Outstanding Advent Sign. Yet in the Olivet Discourse, the proclamation of the Gospel to "all nations" is the only sign which is clearly linked to the End: "And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world, as a testimony to all nation; and then the end will come" (Matt 24:14; par. Mark 13:10).¹

It is noteworthy that with regard to the manifestation of antichrists and wars (Matt 24:4-6), it is said: "*but the end is not yet*" (v. 6). Similarly, with regard to the occurrence of conflicts among nations, famines, and earthquakes, it is said: "*all this is but the beginning of the sufferings*" (v. 8). But

concerning the sign of worldwide Gospel proclamation, it is clearly stated: “*and then the end will come*” (Matt 24:14).² What this means is that of all the given signs, the preaching of the Gospel throughout the world is the only sign connected temporally to the End.

The various signs of turmoil, apostasy, and tribulation are given in the Olivet Discourse as the context of the Gospel proclamation. In other words, by means of these various signs, Jesus is characterizing some of the unfavorable conditions that will accompany the mission of evangelizing the whole world. The latter, however, is given by Christ as the sign that will usher in His Return. Being, then, the outstanding Advent sign, it deserves priority in this study.

2. Evangelization in the Old Testament

Salvation to All the Nations. The Old Testament prophets already anticipate the proclamation of salvation to all the nations. In Isaiah 45:22, God says: “Turn to me and be saved, *all the ends of the earth!* And also: “My house shall be called a house of prayer *for all peoples*” (Is 56:7). The same prophet predicted that God would send His messianic Servant “as a light to *the nations*, that my salvation may reach to *the end of the earth*” (Is 49:6; cf. 42:6; 40:5; 45:22).³

Paul say the fulfillment of this prediction in the Christian mission to the Gentiles (Acts 13:46-47). Similarly James interpreted the Gentiles’ acceptance of the Gospel as the fulfillment of Amos’s prophecy: “After this I will return, and I will rebuild the dwelling of David, which has fallen; I will rebuild its ruins, and I will set it up, *that the rest of men may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles* who are called by my name, says the Lord, who has made these things known from of old” (Acts 15:16-18; cf. Amos 9:11, 12).⁴

Basis of Great Commission. The Old Testament anticipation of the proclamation of salvation to all the nations becomes in the New Testament Christ’s Great Commission to His followers: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations” (Matt 28:19). The fulfillment of this Commission is presented by Christ in His Olivet Discourse as the sign or condition preceding His Parousia: “And this gospel of the Kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world, as a testimony to all nations; and then the end will come” (Matt 24:14; par. Mark 13:10).

3. The Meaning of the Great Commission

A Decisive Witness. What does it mean that before Jesus comes the Gospel must be preached throughout the world, “as a testimony to all nations”? Evidently Jesus does not mean that every single person of every

nation must be converted. The phrase “as a testimony to all nations” suggests rather that the Gospel must become a force to be reckoned with, a witness which calls for decision in every nation, so that those who reject it can be held accountable for their decisions.

Paul seems to understand this passage in this way, when he says: “From Jerusalem as far round as Illyricum I have fully preached the gospel of Christ” (Rom 15:19). Paul was convinced that in this rather extensive area, extending from Greece to Palestine, the Gospel had been fully preached. This is indicated by his further statement, “But now, since *I no longer have any room for work in these regions*, . . . I hope to see you in passing as I go to Spain” (Rom 15:23-24).⁵

Obviously Paul felt that he had “fully preached the gospel of Christ” in this vast territory, not because he had been able to witness to every single person, nor because most of the population had become Christian, but rather because the Good News of salvation had been proclaimed in each region, offering to all the opportunity to hear the Gospel and be saved. The actual number of converts in this vast area was relatively small.

According to the *World Christian Encyclopedia* (1982), it is estimated that by A.D. 100 there were 1 million Christians in the Roman Empire out of a population of 181 million.⁶ This means that by the end of the first century less than 1 percent of the population (0.6% to be exact) was Christian. Presumably the number of Christians was even less in the fifties when Paul wrote. Thus Paul’s conviction of having evangelized the Eastern wing of the Roman Empire rested not on the large number of converts, but on the fact that Christian outposts had been established in crucial centers from where the light of the Gospel was being beamed to the entire region.

4. Can Christian Outreach be Measured?

Today, nineteen centuries later, we may ask, Are we closer to or further away from the completion of the Great Commission of evangelizing the world? How is this important Advent sign being fulfilled in our time? A logical way to answer this question is by surveying the evangelization of the world in our time.

Legitimacy of Statistics. Some may question the legitimacy of using statistical surveys to determine the extent to which the Christian commission of evangelizing the world is being fulfilled. One reason is that the invisible work of the Holy Spirit upon human hearts cannot be measured by numbers. A second reason is that statistics of church memberships may be misleading because there are registered members who are not practicing Christians, and

there are people who are not affiliated with any particular church and yet they profess and practice the Christian faith.

Obviously any statistical survey of Christianity in its world mission has its limitations and is open to the danger either of excessive optimism or of undue pessimism. The recognition of this fact does not, however, negate the value of statistical surveys which can give us a general overview of the growth of Christianity as well as of the magnitude of the unfinished task. The New Testament shows a healthy interest in numbers and their relation to the growth of the Church.

A Sign of Divine Grace. The book of Acts records the progress of the Gospel in numbers and statistics: “there were added that day about three thousand souls” (2:41); “many of those who heard the word believed; and the number of the men came to about five thousand” (4:4); “And the word of the Lord increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem” (6:7; cf. 9:31; 12:24; 16:5; 19:20; 28:23, 31).

These numbers and quantifications given in Acts serve as signs of divine grace manifested in the growth of the Christian mission. By the same token, contemporary statistics of a specific church or of Christianity as a whole can help believers to perceive the progress or regress of the Christian mission. With this in mind we will look briefly at the status of Christianity at this point in history. Our aim is not to calculate the nearness of the Second Advent on the basis of how much of the world has been evangelized or of how much still remains unevangelized, but rather to verify how this important Advent sign is being fulfilled in our time.

5. Christian Expansion Over 20 Centuries

To put in proper perspective the status of Christianity today, it helps to take a global overview of its growth over the past twenty centuries. The data used for this report are drawn mostly from the *World Christian Encyclopedia*, a major research project produced by competent scholars and newly released (1982) by Oxford University Press.

During the past nineteen centuries Christianity has gradually grown in size and influence. At the end of the first century (A.D. 100), as already mentioned, Christians numbered about 1 million in a population of 181 million, thus representing less than 1 percent of mankind (0.6%). A thousand years later (A.D. 1000) there were 50 million Christians in a population of 269 million, thus representing 18 percent of the population. Nine centuries later, by the year 1900, one third of humanity (34.4%) were Christians, that is, 558 million Christians in a population of 1,619 million.

During the twentieth century Christianity has grown enormously from 558 million in 1900 to 1,433 million by 1980. The latter, however, represents only 32.8 percent of the world population estimated in 1980 at 4,374 million. What this means is that in spite of Christianity's phenomenal expansion, the actual percentage of profession Christians has declined in proportion to the world population from 34.4 percent in 1900 to 32.8 percent in 1980.⁸

This decline has been caused primarily by defections from Christianity due to secularism in Western Europe, Communism in Eastern Europe, and materialism in the Americas and elsewhere. The massive apostasies of our century themselves constitute a significant Advent sign, to be considered shortly.

6. Global Christianity Today

Massive Gains. The massive losses Christianity has experienced in the Western and Communist worlds over the last sixty years—primarily due to secularism, materialism, and ideological totalitarianism—have been offset by massive gains in other parts of the world. In the Third World Christianity has surged from 83 million in 1900 to 643 million by 1980.⁹

In Africa, Christians have mushroomed from 9.9 million in 1900 to 203 million in 1980. The present net increase in Africa is 6 million new Christians a year, of which 1.5 million are new converts. In South Asia also there is a sizable net increase of over 3 million per year, of whom 447,000 are new converts. Significant increases are also taking place in Latin America (8 million per year), and in East Asia (636,000 per year of whom 360,000 are new converts).¹⁰

Internationalization. These statistics point to a significant aspect of the growth of Christianity in the twentieth century, namely, its internationalization. Jesus had predicted that the “gospel of the kingdom will be preached throughout the world, as a testimony to all nations,” yet by 1900 Christianity was still predominantly a Western religion. Eighty-five percent of its member (470 million) lived in the Western World and only 15 percent (87 million) lived in the Third World. During the course of our century a radical change has occurred: Christianity has truly become a global religion. In 1980 only 32.8 percent of Christians lived in the Western World, while 44.1 percent lived in the Third World, and 17.7 percent lived in the Communist World.¹¹

It can no longer be said that Christianity is a white man's religion. This was still largely true at the turn of the century when 81 percent of Christians were white, but it is no longer true today when the whites have become a minority (48%) and the non-whites a majority (52%).

Today *for the first time* the Gospel is being proclaimed to practically “every nation and tribe and tongue and people” (Rev 14:6). The *World Christian Encyclopedia* notes in this regard: “During the 20th century, Christianity has become the most extensive and universal religion in history. There are today Christians and organized Christian churches in every inhabited country on earth. The church is therefore now, *for the first time in history*, ecumenical in the literal meaning of the word: its boundaries are coextensive with the *oikumene*, the whole inhabited world.”¹²

7. Availability of the Scriptures

Bible Translations. The unique expansion of Christianity in the twentieth century is reflected also in the number of Bible translations produced during this century. According to the *World Christian Encyclopedia*, there are today some 7,010 different languages, two-thirds of which are spoken by relatively few people. By 1900 the Bible had become available, in whole or in part, in 537 languages. During the course of our century prodigious efforts have been made to translate the Bible into many new languages. The result of this effort has been impressive. By 1980 the Scriptures had been translated into a total of 1,811 languages which are spoken by 96 percent of the world population.¹³

Christianity still faces the staggering challenge of translating the Scriptures into the remaining 5,200 languages. It must be noted, however, that the total number of people speaking these languages is today some 185 million, a number which, though impressive, in actual fact represents only 4.2 percent of the world population.

To meet this challenge at present there are 986 translation projects in progress. Though the task of translating the Scriptures into every distinct language is still formidable, the fact remains that the Scriptures are available today for the first time in languages spoken by 96 percent of the world population. This global availability of Scriptures is an indispensable prerequisite for worldwide evangelization.

Bible Distribution. Not only the translation but also the annual distribution of Scriptures has risen enormously during this century. From a total of 5.4 million whole Bibles sold or distributed in the year 1900, the number has risen to a total of 36.8 million in 1980. In this same year the United Bible Societies distributed also over 432 million Scripture selections.¹⁴

Certain modern translations of the Bible have been best sellers. *The Living Bible*, for example, for several years has outsold all other books in the United States, with current sales of over 20 million copies. The global

availability and widespread distribution of the Scriptures represent a significant indication of the way the Advent sign of worldwide evangelization is being fulfilled in our time.

8. The Unfinished Mission

Someone may ask: “Is the sign of the evangelization of the world truly being fulfilled in our time when professing Christians today still account for only one third (32.8%) of the world population?” We noted earlier that the Great Commission to evangelize all the nations requires not a global conversion of every person, but a global proclamation of the Gospel to every nation.

The question then is, What is the extent of the Gospel proclamation today? How many persons still remain unevangelized, that is, unaware of the Christian message, out of the world population estimated at 4,374 million in 1980?

According to the statistical report compiled by the *World Christian Encyclopedia*, “the global total of evangelized populations in 1980 is 2,993 million. The evangelized can be further divided into 1,433 million Christians, who by definition either profess Christ or are part of his church; and 1,561 million whom we here term evangelized non-Christians—persons who are not Christians in any recognized sense, but who have become aware of Christianity, Christ and the gospel, and yet have not, or not yet, responded positively by accepting them.”¹⁵

This means that by 1980, 68 percent of the world population had been evangelized while 32 percent (1,381 million) still remained unevangelized, unaware of Christianity and the Gospel. Though the percentage of unevangelized persons is still very large—about one third of the world population—in comparison to previous periods of history, it is the smallest it has ever been. For example, the percentage of the evangelized population of the world was 28 percent by the year 100, 25 percent by the year 1000, 50 percent by 1900, 68 percent by 1980 and is projected to reach 80 percent by the year 2000.¹⁶

Evangelistic Resources. Moreover, Christianity possesses today an unprecedented quantity and variety of resources such as service agencies, educational and medical institution, national and foreign workers, books and periodicals, the Scriptures in over 1800 languages, radio and television broadcasting, and impressive financial means. Resources such as these, utilized by committed Christians under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, make the task of evangelizing the whole world a realistic possibility in our time.

Perhaps one of the most far-reaching evangelistic resources available today is Christian broadcasting. At the turn of this century radio broadcasting did not yet exist, since it came into existence in 1921. By 1980 Christian radio and TV programs had reached a staggering monthly audience of over 990 million persons. In the light of these human and technical resources available today, “the dimensions of the unfinished task of world evangelization,” as pointed out by the *World Christian Encyclopedia*, “are in fact very much smaller than contemporary Protestant and Catholic missionary organizations realize.”¹⁷

Obviously the task of finishing the evangelization of the world depends not merely upon human resources but primarily upon divine enablings. The unparalleled human and technical resources available today can be used effectively by the Holy Spirit to fulfill the divine mandate to evangelize the whole world.

9. Seventh-Day Adventist Evangelization

Seventh-day Adventists see their movement as one of the instruments used by God to fulfill the prominent Advent sign of the evangelization of the world. They perceive themselves as one of the folds of God’s universal flock of believers (John 10:16), called into existence to announce to the whole world the saving good news of a soon-Coming Savior and inviting all to prepare to meet Him.

As suggested by their church’s name, Seventh-day Adventists believe that an important aspect of the preparation to meet the Lord in space on the Day of His Coming is the weekly preparation to meet the Lord in time on His Holy Sabbath day. To put it differently, the weekly Lord’s Day is theologically and existentially interrelated to the final Day of the Lord.

Pattern of Growth. The pattern of growth of the Seventh-day Adventist Church resembles, at least in one way, that of global Christianity. Like the latter, the Seventh-day Adventist Church at the turn of the century was still predominantly a Western religion. According to the General Conference Statistical Report, at the turn of the century (1902), 93 percent of the Seventh-day Adventist membership (72,156) lived in North America and Europe, whereas only 7 percent of its members (5,396) lived in the rest of the world.¹⁸

A radical change has occurred during the twentieth century as the Seventh-day Adventist Church has expanded not only numerically from a total membership of 77,000 in the year 1902 to 4 million members by July, 1983, but also geographically. In fact, by the end of 1982 only 21 percent of SDA believers lived in North America and Europe while 79 percent lived in Africa, Asia, Latin America, Oceania, Australia, and New Zealand.¹⁹

If the present trend continues, two decades from now the SDA membership in the Western world will represent barely 10 percent of its world membership. This means that in less than a century the SDA Church has grown from an American-based church to a universal church which today is well established in 90 percent of all the countries of the world and embraces people of many different cultures, races, languages groups, and political systems.

Effectiveness of SDA Mission. Numerically the SDA Church is still small in comparison to older Christian churches, yet its evangelization of the world transcends its relatively small membership. Today, in fact, the SDA Church is the most widespread of all Protestant denomination, proclaiming the Gospel in 184 countries, supporting the largest number of missionaries in the field (ca. 3,200), and operating a worldwide chain of institutions such as 420 hospitals and clinics, 82 universities and colleges, 844 secondary schools, 50 publishing houses, nearly 3500 radio and TV stations used each week, Bible correspondence schools, etc.²⁰

The effectiveness of the world evangelization of a church cannot be determined, however, solely by its geographical expansion, institutional strength, and numerical growth, but rather by the way it helps people and societies to experience the fruits of the Gospel such as love, peace, freedom from the power and penalty of sin, joy, hope, meaning in life, healing from destructive habits, and social and moral reforms. Measured by these criteria, the SDA Church has been greatly used by God—beyond its relatively small membership—to accomplish the mission of proclaiming the Good News of salvation to all nations.

An indication of the effectiveness of the Adventist mission is the fact that in 1982, for example, various governments and international agencies have channeled through the SDA church over \$16 million to help people in various countries in their programs. Another indication is the fact that in several countries of the Third World, government censuses report from three to five times more people who regard themselves as SDA than are actually registered in the church records. Dr. Gottfried Oosterwal, the Director of the General Conference Institute of World Mission, estimates that “the number of these ‘anonymous Seventh-day Adventists’ in the world today may conservatively be estimated at some ten million people.”²¹

CONCLUSION

This brief study of the outstanding Advent sign of world evangelization has shown that its fulfillment has occurred in an unprecedented way in our century. Christianity in general and Seventh-day Adventism in particular have grown spectacularly during the twentieth century, both in numbers and in geographic expansion. From a predominantly Western white man's religion, both Christianity and Adventism have become global, proclaiming the Gospel for the first time in history to practically all the nations of the world.

Though the mission of evangelizing all the world is still unfinished—one third of the world population is still unaware of Christianity, Christ, and the Gospel—Christians today are provided by God with an unparalleled quantity and variety of resources which make it possible to complete the mission sooner than many realize. This means that the prominent Advent sign of the Gospel proclamation throughout the whole world is being fulfilled in a unique way in our time. The fulfillment of this sign gives us reason to believe that “he is near, at the very gates” (Matt 24:33).

NOTES TO CHAPTER 8

1. Anthony A. Hoekema rightly points out that “the missionary preaching of the gospel to all nations is, in fact, the outstanding and most characteristic sign of the times. It gives to the present age its primary meaning and purpose” (*The Bible and the Future [Grand Rapids, 1979]*, p. 138). Similarly G. C. Berkouwer writes, “In the last days the preaching of the gospel is the focal point of all the signs. In it all the signs can and must be understood” (*The Return of Christ [Grand Rapids, 1972]*, p. 251).

2. Emphasis supplied.

3. All the emphases in the paragraph are supplied.

4. Emphasis supplied.

5. Emphasis supplied.

6. 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), p. 3.

7. See Global Table 1 in *World Christian Encyclopedia* (n. 6), p. 3.

8. *Ibid.*, pp. 3-5.

9. See Global Table 2 in *World Christian Encyclopedia* (n. 6), p. 4.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 5.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 6.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 3; emphasis supplied.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 13.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 13; see also Global Tables 12 and 31.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 19.

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

17. *Ibid.*, p. 19. The author continues by noting that “on average, each Christian today is reaching and evangelizing 2.4 times as many non-Christians as the average Christian in 1900.”

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

19. *120th Annual Statistical Report, 1982*, compiled by Office of Archives and Statistics of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, p. 1.

20. See Gottfried Oosterwal, “The Seventh-day Adventist Church in the World Today” in *Servants for Christ*, ed. Robert E. Firth (Berrien Springs, 1980), pp. 1-4. Also *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook 1984*.

21. Gottfried Oosterwal (n. 20), p. 5.

Chapter 9

THE NATURE OF BIBLICAL HOPE

Human rebellion against God manifests itself in different ways. Some persons show their opposition to God by attributing to themselves divine prerogatives. They claim to be “messiahs” or “prophets” with new revelations and new plans of salvation. Others display their rebellion against God by denying His very existence or at least some of the basic divinely revealed truths. Still others live self-centered lives, seeking merely to gratify their appetites without respect for God or for anyone else.

Objective of Chapter. This chapter examines the contemporary fulfillment of those Advent signs of opposition to God which are mentioned specifically by Christ in His Olivet Discourse. Consideration will also be given to the complementary information provided by Paul and John. For the sake of clarity, these signs are analyzed in the following order:

1. Messianic Pretenders
2. The Antichrist
3. The Apostasy
4. The Evildoer
5. Increased Wickedness
6. Age of Appetite
7. Age of Sex

PART ONE

MESSIANIC PRETENDERS

The first sign of the End given by Christ in His Olivet Discourse is the appearance of “*false Christs*”: “Take heed that no one leads you astray. For many will come in my name, saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and they will lead many astray” (Matt 24:4-5; cf. Mark 13:5-6).

The same warning is repeated again later in the same discourse: “Then if any one says to you, ‘Lo, here is the Christ!’ or ‘There he is!’ do not believe it. For false Christs and false prophets will arise and show great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect” (Matt 24:23-24; cf. Mark 13:21-22). The phrase “false Christs” can be translated as “false messiahs” since the name “Christ” is the Greek rendering (“*Christos*”) of the Hebrew “*Mashiah*,” which means “Messiah, Anointed.”

1. First-Century Messiahs

Christ’s discourse begins with this warning about the appearance of “false Christs and false prophets” for obvious reasons. At that time there was an intense messianic expectation and Christians as well as Jews were susceptible of being deceived by the self-styled messiahs who frequently appeared, especially until the Barkochba revolt (A.D. 132-135).

The warning of Christ, however, goes beyond the contemporary deception of messianic pretenders, since He speaks of them not only in the context of the destruction of Jerusalem (Matt 24:15-22) but also in connection with the Second Advent (Matt 24:27). In Matthew the description of “the coming of the Son of man” as a shining lightning (24:27) is preceded immediately by the warning about “false Christs and false prophets” (24:24-26).

This suggests that the appearance of pseudo-messiahs and pseudo-prophets, who pretend to offer salvation, will occur up to the Return of Christ. In fact, the Scripture predicts an increased manifestation of anti-Christ forces before the End (2 Thess 2:3; Rev 13).

2. Contemporary Messiahs

Prophetic and messianic pretenders have frequently arisen during the Christian era. From Montanism in the second century to Mormonism in the nineteenth century, religious movements have arisen, founded by self-styled prophets who claimed to possess new revelations and new plans of salvation. In our time, however, this specific Advent sign is being witnessed in an unprecedented way. New Eastern and Western cults are proliferating in the Christian world.

New “Messiahs.” The “messiahs” and “prophets” of these new religious movements pretend to offer new ways of salvation to their followers. For example, Young Oon Kim, a leading theologian of the well known Unification Church (Moonies), in her book *Unification Theology*, questions the “total sufficiency of Jesus’ atoning death on the cross.” “Although it is not an explicitly stated doctrine,” write *Christianity Today*, “many Moonies believe the new messiah is Sun Myung Moon.”¹

It is noteworthy that several of these contemporary self-appointed prophets come from an evangelical background. Sun Myung Moon, founder of the Unification Church (Moonies), was raised in a missionary Presbyterian home. Jim Jones, founder of the People's Temple, was a pastor of an interdenominational charismatic church and of a Disciples of Christ church. Moses David, founder of the Children of God, was associated with the Christian and Missionary Alliance. Paul Wiewille, founder of The Way, was a Reformed pastor.²

The Christian background of the "prophetic" leaders accounts for some of the Biblical elements present in their teachings which attract many persons. Essentially their teachings and practices in most cases represent an open denial of the Christian faith. Jim Jones, for example, forced his followers to seek for salvation in a vat of poisoned punch.

Reasons for Their Success. A factor contributing to the acceptance of certain contemporary pseudo-prophets is their capacity to lead their followers into an artificially stimulated heightened sense of spirituality, uniformity, and identity. For example, the Indian guru Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh, who in 1981 moved his headquarters to a 64,229 acre spread in Oregon, claims to have the power to energize his 250,000 followers. One of his followers, a former Catholic charismatic, interviewed by *Christianity Today*, said: "Jesus was my first master, but Bhagwan is a living master. My master is inside myself. Bhagwan is an outer expression of it." Another said: "I had a longing inside that wasn't being fulfilled. Bhagwan is an extension of Christ."³

The Rajneesh Foundation placed advertisements in *Newsweek* and *Time* displaying a picture of the guru with this caption: "Jesus is available to all; Jesus is for those who are ready to transform themselves;; Jesus is an art of inner transformation, of rebirth."⁴ This kind of falsification and transformation of Christ from an objective, historical Savior into a subjective experience realized through the guidance of a messianic leader has an appeal, especially for those contemporary Christians who are more interested in experiencing (charismatic) than in understanding spiritual realities.

This overemphasis on subjective experience may be partly a reaction to the uncertainties created by rationalism and liberalism which have infiltrated particularly certain Protestant churches during this past century. Lacking theological certainty, some seek the assurance of salvation through a kind of personal experience, which, regrettably, in some cases is artificially stimulated by pseudo-messiahs.

3. The Dangers of the New “Messiahs”

The menace posed today by new “messianic” leaders is widely acknowledged. *Christianity Today* calls it “a reality that has staggered our imaginations.”⁵ To counteract this danger, numerous books have been written such as *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. An organization known as *Spiritual Counterfeits Project* has been established in Berkeley, California to provide information about cults.⁶

A Widespread Problem. The success of messianic pretenders is not limited to the U.S.A. In an article entitled “Europe’s Rising Cults,” *Newsweek* reports that in Britain alone, the followers of Mahrishi Mahesh Yogi, known as the Age of Enlightenment, numbered 94,000, in 1979 and the Scientologists, founded by L. Ron Hubbard, numbered 250,000 at the same time.⁷

In other parts of the world the cult of false messiahs assumes different names and forms but it is equally pervasive. In Brazil, for example, according to the news magazine *Veja* of São Paulo (January 7, 1981), “the largest participatory religion in Brazil has become the cult of Umbanda, in which 30 million people are involved.”⁸ This cult is an Animist-Christian hybrid which worships a messianic deity called Iemanjá. The magazine says that this cult is popular not only among the poor “but has now become vogueish in every social stratum.”⁹

A similar phenomenon is present in Venezuela. David Browne writes in *El Diario de Caracas* of January 3, 1981: “Every oil dollar brings another million to the cult of Maria Lionza,” an Indian maid who supposedly fled to the jungle during the Spanish conquest. Browne remarks that the cult reveals a fascinating paradox: “While the country advances . . . millions of Venezuelans find spiritual guidance in the myths and legends of the past.”¹⁰ The same phenomenon of the worship of some reputed Savior is present in many other countries.

4. Impersonal “Messiahs”

Christ’s prediction about the appearance of “false Christs and false prophets” is fulfilled in our time also in the appearance of impersonal messiahs such as science, technology, politico-economic systems or parties, and mass education. These are viewed by many as capable of ensuring to mankind a better tomorrow.

Impersonal messiahs have caused massive losses to Christianity in the Western and Communist worlds during the last sixty years. For example, according to the *World Christian Encyclopedia*, in the Soviet Union Chris-

tians have fallen from 83 percent of the population in 1900 to 36 percent today.¹¹ Many of these defectors have accepted Communism as their messianic hope for a better tomorrow. For many, Marx or Lenin plays a messianic role.

In North America and Western Europe, as will be mentioned below, almost three million Christians every year give up their Christian faith, accepting instead secularistic, humanistic ideologies which see the only hope for a better tomorrow in the development of material and human resources. Instead of faith in Christ, technology, science, and human progress dominate their thinking. These are some of the impersonal messianic pretenders of our time.

Conclusion. The unprecedented appearance today of both personal and impersonal false messiahs who attract millions of persons worldwide represents a unique fulfillment of Christ's warning about the "false Christs and false prophets" who would arise before His Return. To understand more fully the significance of this important Advent sign, we shall now consider the complementary information provided by other authors of the New Testament.

PART TWO

THE ANTICHRIST

Christ's warning about the appearance of "false Christs" has found its fulfillment not only in past and present arising of messianic pretenders but also in the person of teachers of false doctrines.

1. John and the Antichrist

In two of his three letters, John refers four times specifically to "the antichrist" (1 John 2:18, 22; 4:3; 2 John 7). He is viewed by John as the fulfillment of Christ's prediction about "false Christs," as indicated by his statement, "you have heard that antichrist is coming" (1 John 2:18 cf. 4:3). The phrase "you [or "we"] have heard" is used by John ten times in his two epistles to refer to a teaching of Christ which had been transmitted to the believers.¹²

It is noteworthy that by the time of John's writing (A.D. 90-100), Christians had coined a specific term, "the antichrist," to designate the expected appearance of "false Christs and false prophets." Presumably such a term was yet unknown few decades earlier, since Paul uses other designations: "the man of lawlessness," "the son of perdition" (2 Thess 2:3). The latter, however, as we shall see, differs from John's antichrist in several ways. The variety of names and characterizations of the expected "false Christs and false prophets" indicates how deeply felt this Advent sign was at that time.

Definition of “Antichrist.” Linguistically, the term “antichrist” can denote a “substitute” or an “opponent” of Christ since the Greek preposition “anti” can mean either “in the place of” or “against.” In John the term is used primarily in the latter sense. The “antichrist” is not a messianic pretender but one who opposes Christ by denying His incarnation and messiahship.

“Who is the liar,” writes John, “but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, he who denies the Father and the Son” (1 John 2:22). “Every spirit which confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit which does not confess Jesus is not of God. This is the spirit of antichrist” (1 John 4:2-3).

Denial of Incarnation. The genuine incarnation of Christ was denied in John’s time by the Gnostics. In their view matter was altogether evil, and consequently they taught that Christ could never have assumed human flesh. His body was not genuinely human but only had a human appearance.

In John’s view this teaching was a deadly heresy because it undermined the validity of Christ’s atonement. Thus he identifies the propagators of this heresy with “the antichrist”: “For many deceivers have gone out into the world, men who will not acknowledge the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh; such a one is the deceiver and the antichrist” (2 John 7).

In this passage “the antichrist” is singular and specific (preceded by the article—*ho antichristos*), but it is used to describe not one specific false teacher, but the “many deceivers” who were misleading the believers. In fact, in 1 John 2:18 the plural form is used (“Now many *antichrists* have come”) to describe these false teachers. This indicates that John sees the antichrist not necessarily as an individual person but as a principle of hostility and opposition to God, manifested in the antichristian teachings and teachers of his time. This principle is designated by John as “the spirit of antichrist” (1 John 4:3).

2. The End-Time Antichrists

The appearance of false teachers who denied the full deity of Christ is also perceived by John eschatologically, that is, as a sign of the imminent End: “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).¹³ What believers had heard about the coming of “false Christs and false prophets” was then being fulfilled before them in the form of false teachers. This fulfillment gave John reasons to believe he was living in the “last hour,” on the eve of the Lord’s Return.

Some may wish to condemn John as a deceiver, since time has proved that it was not the “last hour” for the church. Nineteen centuries have gone by since then. Such a condemnation would fail to recognize the *actuality* of the Advent signs in every generation. The Advent signs, as shown in the previous chapter, are relevant to believers of every generation.

The signs have nourished the hope of the coming of the Lord by pointing believers to the imminent consummation of redemption and by calling them to constant readiness. The sign of the “antichrist” was unquestionably being fulfilled in John’s time with the appearance of false teachers who denied the full deity of Christ. But the “spirit of antichrist” which was “in the world already” (1 John 4:3) in John’s time, has had its tentacles in every generation of the church and is especially pervasive today.

3. Contemporary Antichrists

During this century the “spirit of antichrist” has been manifested in different ways. One manifestation can be seen in the rationalistic, liberal movements which have challenged not only the reality of the incarnation, but also other basic historical Christian beliefs such as the infallible authority of the Bible, a fiat creation, the atonement and resurrection of Christ, the occurrence of miracles, the Second Advent, original sin, etc. These and other cardinal Biblical beliefs have been “demythologized” by European and American liberal theologians, in order to reconcile them with a humanistic view of history which excludes supernatural, miraculous activity.

Denial of Christ’s Resurrection. Rudolf Bultmann, for example, excludes the credibility of the accounts of Christ’s resurrection because, as he plainly states, “a historical fact which involves a resurrection from the dead is utterly inconceivable.”¹⁴ Harvard theologian Gordon D. Kaufman explains the belief of the earliest Christians in the bodily resurrection of Christ as caused by hallucinatory visions of the risen Christ. Like other liberal theologians, he sees the meaning of the resurrection not in the fate of Jesus’ body but in the ongoing divine activity on behalf of believers.¹⁵

This subtle attempt to divorce faith from its historical foundation empties faith of the basis of its assurance. As Paul put it: “If Christ has not been raised . . . your faith is in vain” (1 Cor 15:14). To dematerialize the belief in the bodily resurrection of Christ, reducing it to a symbol of divine activity, means to rob believers of a concrete assurance of their final resurrection and of the renewal of creation (1 Cor 15:12-24).

Denial of the Incarnation. The spirit of the antichrist is also present today, as in John’s day, in the denial by some Christian leaders of the

incarnation of Christ. In 1977 seven English academics produced a symposium, published under the title *The Myth of God Incarnate*. As indicated by the title, the incarnation of Christ is treated as a myth, allegedly created by Samaritan converts in the fifties of the first century.

Don Cupitt, one of the contributors, defines Christ as “a purely human Jesus, a first-century man of God in the Jewish tradition.”¹⁶ When John R. W. Stott asked one of the contributors, “‘Tell me, do you ever worship Jesus?’ ‘No,’ came his immediate response, ‘I don’t’”¹⁷ One wonders, Can people who refuse to worship Christ as their Lord and Savior be rightfully called Christians? In our view John’s designation of such persons as “antichrists” is quite appropriate.

Denial of the Second Advent. Another example of the spirit of the antichrist can be seen in those existential theologies which interpret the Second Advent, not as a cosmic event that will occur within history, but as a mythical expression of a timeless truth. To reduce the Second Advent from a future realization of our present expectations to a present experience of the future means to empty present life of its meaning. It deprives believers of the Biblical perspective on the End and of motivation to live responsibly in anticipation of the Parousia.

Denial of the Existence of God. The spirit of antichrist is also visible in the teaching of those radical theologians who some year ago made national news by proclaiming the death of God. Thomas J. Altizer, for example, in his book *Radical Theology and the Death of God*, contends that “we must realize that God has died in our cosmos, in our history, in our *Existenz*.”¹⁸ He goes on to explain that not only the God of “religion” has died, but also “the God of the historic Christian Church, and beyond the Church of Christendom at large.” These radical theologians urge the abandonment of the traditional belief in God and the adoption of a wholly secularized world view.

Secular Humanism. Secular consciousness characterizes today’s pervasive secular humanism which embodies in a unique way the spirit of the antichrist. Traditionally, humanism has the merit of having emphasized Christian values such as human dignity, equality, and tolerance. Today, however, secular humanism undergirds the denial of God and promotes evolution and self-indulgence.

Ernest Morgan writes in *The Humanist*, “I have little use for evangelical Christianity. I regard Jesus as a wise and dedicated teacher: very human and strongly influenced by the thinkers of his day.”¹⁹ The false teachers of John’s time denied the humanity of Christ. The humanists of our time deny His

divinity. Both share equally in the spirit of the antichrist, by denying the full personhood of the God-man, Jesus Christ.

Morgan recognizes that contemporary men and women need “the ideals and values of traditional Christianity,” but argues that “they do not need the archaic theology that encrusts these values.” He goes on to say that “to separate the wheat from the chaff . . . is a major challenge of our time.”²⁰

One wonders, How is it possible to retain or recover Christian ideals and values while destroying their theological foundations? Does not the Christian value of human dignity and equality derive from the belief in the divine creation, redemption, and final restoration of human beings? Is it really possible to value human beings highly without first recognizing what God has done, is doing, and will do for them? Secular humanism, by denying the existence and saving activities of God, undermines the very foundation of those human values it seeks to promote.

4. The Impact of the Antichrist Spirit

It is impossible to estimate and comprehend the impact of secular, humanistic ideologies upon religious and public education, the Christian faith, governmental policies, the media, and the moral values of our society. The following few examples will serve to illustrate this point.

Theological Education. In an issue of *Theological Education* (Spring 1981), the semiannual publication of the Association of Theological Schools, Edward Farley of Vanderbilt University Divinity School acknowledges with astonishing frankness that the unifying center of “mainline” theological education has fallen out.

A basic reason given by Farley is the negative impact of the critical historical study which has shattered the authority of the Bible. Having no longer an infallible divine guide in the Scripture, there is no longer a coherent Christian message and mission. Each member of the faculty sounds his own tune, thus creating a cacophonous orchestra where each musician plays a different concert.²¹

Unbelief and Apostasy. The echo of this cacophony produced by liberal theological education is heard especially in “mainline” denominations, where it is causing an alarming decline in membership and an erosion of basic Christian beliefs. A recent survey of the religious attitudes of Canadians, for example, reveals an astonishing decline of the belief in God, and in church membership, especially among the members of the country’s largest denomination, the United Church of Canada.

“It seems noteworthy,” the survey points out, “that only about 40 percent of actual United church members claim unequivocal belief in God and the divinity of Christ.”²² The same United Church of Canada registered a sharp drop in membership from 1,0622,006 members in 1966 to 930,226 in 1977. Church attendance also has declined from a high of 61 percent in 1956 to a low of 28 percent for United and 24 percent for Anglican members in 1978.²³

In Europe the problem is even more acute than in North America. In England, for example, “on a typical Sunday, only 2 percent of the 28 million Britons who are self-described members show up for the staid services of the established Anglican Church.”²⁴ A 1975 BBC poll reported that only 29 percent of the people of Britain believed strongly in the existence of a personal God.²⁵

In other European countries the situation is basically the same. Church attendance in the State churches ranges from 2 to 10 percent of the membership. The defection from Christianity among church attenders is equally astonishing. The *World Christian Encyclopedia* reports that “every year, some 2,765,100 church attenders in Europe and North America cease to be practicing Christians within the 12-month period, an average loss of 7,600 every day.”²⁶

An important cause of this astonishing increase in disbelief and decrease in the membership of “mainline” Protestant churches is the liberal, humanistic orientation of their pastors and religious leaders. When a church chooses to communicate secular humanistic values instead of divinely revealed principles and plans for human life, as aptly stated by Reginald Bibby, it “may well engage in self-liquidation, through finishing a distant second to superior secular competitors.”²⁷ The church must communicate beliefs, hopes, and values that transcend those of secular competitors. Only then will people find the church worthy of their commitment, worthy of transmitting it to their children and to others.

Erosion of Moral Values. The spirit of the antichrist manifested in the liberal and humanistic theologies of our time contributes also to the erosion of fundamental moral values. When belief in God and in His revelation is abandoned, all moral values become relative, because there is no longer a normative divine revelation to guide us in distinguishing right from wrong.

The doubts (if not outright denials) communicated by liberal religious leaders about God, the authority of the Scriptures, creation, the incarnation, atonement, resurrection, and Second Coming of Christ, have encouraged the replacement of divine moral imperatives with individual permissiveness.

Human life for many has lost its sanctity, as indicated by the destruction of million of lives every year through abortion, criminal acts, war, and policies of dictatorial regimes. Human relationships also for many are no longer sacred, as evidence by the appalling number of marital contracts which are terminated every year.

Immoral connotations of illicit sexual acts are being eliminated through the introduction of new “softer” terms. Fornication is now referred to as “premarital sex,” with the accept 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.

This “softness” extends to literature and entertainment. Immoral films are shown to “mature” audiences. Pornographic books are available in “adult” bookstores. In his book, *Whatever Became of Sin?*, psychiatrist Karl Menninger perceptively points out that many “sins,” once forgiven by confession of guilt and repentance, today have evolved into “symptoms” treatable by psychotherapy as illness—with responsibility placed on everything and everyone except the guilty person.²⁷

Conclusion. The End-time sign of the antichrist predicted by John is being fulfilled today in an extraordinary way. In John’s time the spirit of the antichrist was at work in those false teachers who denied the incarnation of Christ. Today the spirit of antichrist is at work not only in those who deny Christ’s incarnation, but also in those who reject His atonement, resurrection, Second Coming, and other basic Bible beliefs.

The impact of the “spirit of antichrist” is noticeable especially in the increasing disbelief and defection from Christianity in the Western world and in the erosion of Christian moral values. The words of John ring especially true 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).

PART THREE

THE APOSTASY

Closely related to the appearance of the antichrist, there are two other joint Advent signs given by Paul in the so-called “little apocalypse” of 2 Thessalonians 2. These are the coming of the great apostasy and the appearance of the “man of lawlessness.” We shall consider these two signs in the sequence given since they are casually and temporally interrelated.

1. The Pauline Context

To appreciate the significance of these two precursory Advent signs, it is important to understand the context in which they were given. Paul had heard that the Thessalonians were being unsettled in their minds and habits by some persons who taught that “the day of the Lord has come” (2 Thess 2:2). This teaching caused excitement and unrest, leading some to stop working altogether, since they believed that the Lord had already come (2 Thess 3:6-15).

To correct this deceptive teaching and the disorders it had caused, Paul reminds the church of what he taught them orally, namely that Christ “will not come, unless the rebellion comes first and the man of lawlessness is revealed” (2 Thess 2:3). The two events mentioned by Paul deserve our consideration because they are specifically linked to the Parousia.

2. Apostasy in New Testament Times

The first pre-Advent sign given by Paul is “the rebellion”—a translation of the Greek “*apostasia*” from which our English word “apostasy” is derived. This word is used in the New Testament both as a noun (Acts 21:21) and as a verb (1 Tim 4:1; Heb 3:12), to denote departure from the faith, falling away from the true God.

Predicted by Christ. In His Olivet Discourse Christ also predicted a future apostasy in the following words: “And then many will fall away, and betray one another and hate one another. And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. And because wickedness is multiplied, most men’s love will grow cold” (Matt 24:10-12; cf. 24:24). Apostasy is here closely related to the appearance of false prophets (the antichrist discussed above), since the latter are often the cause of the former.

Present in New Testament Times. The End-time apostasy predicted by Christ was recognized as being fulfilled in New Testament times. The author of Hebrews speaks of those who were committing “apostasy” (Heb 6:6) by spurning the Son of God (Heb 10:29). John sadly speaks of those members who “went out from us, but they were not of us” (1 John 2:19). He views their apostasy as the fulfillment of the expected antichrist (1 John 2:18).

Paul warns Timothy about the apostasy of “the last days” of “the last times”: “Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith . . .” (1 Tim 4:1). “But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of stress. For men will be lovers of self, . . . holding the form of religion but denying the power of it” (2 Tim 3:1,5).

The expression “the last days,” as noted in chapter 2, designates in the New Testament the entire period between the First and Second Advents. Paul already say the apostasy of the last days taking place in his own time, for he urges Timothy to avoid those who “oppose the truth, men of corrupt mind and counterfeit faith” (2 Tim 3:8).

3. The Final Apostasy

Paul’s Teaching. While Paul recognized that the End-time apostasy was “already at work” (2 Thess 2:7), he makes it abundantly clear that “*the* apostasy,” that is, the well-known pre-Advent rebellion, had not taken place yet. The latter is indicated by the use in Greek of the definite article, “*the* apostasy,” and by the statement that this event must occur before (“first”—2 Thess 2:3) the Second Advent.

The rebellion “already at work” in Paul’s time was not the final, End-time, well-known apostasy about which he had instructed the church orally (2 Thess 2:5), but only the prelude to it. The Apostle recognized that apostasy was already occurring, but he believed and taught that there was yet to come a final, climactic manifestation of it just before the Return of Christ. This final apostasy is linked with the appearance of the “man of lawlessness” whom we shall soon consider.

Apostasy Today. Is the final, apocalyptic apostasy predicted by Paul taking place in Christendom today? The earlier study of the signs of the worldwide evangelization and of the antichrist have indicated that twentieth-century Christianity has experienced not only massive gains across the Third World but also massive apostasies in the Western and Communist worlds. In Europe and North American, according to the *World Christian Encyclopedia*, “net defections from Christianity—converts to other religions or to irreligion—are now running to 1,820,500 former Christians a year.”²⁸

The total number of apostasies, however, is much higher if the meaning of “apostasy” is broadened to include not only formal defectors from the Christian faith but also nominal Christians who are indifferent toward God. The latter include the large number of Christians, especially in Western Europe, who view their Christian religion primarily as a cultural heritage. They do not feel committed to basic Christian beliefs or practices. In fact, some of the surveys cited earlier indicate that in some Western countries there are between 60 and 70 percent of “Christians” who do not even believe in the existence of God.

The Extent of Apostasy. The extent of this practical (*de facto*) apostasy is hard to measure statistically. One reason is that churches generally do not

remove from their registers the names of those indifferent members who question basic Biblical beliefs and who rarely attend church. This is particularly true of the State churches where people become members at birth by baptism and their names remain in the church register until their funeral service, unless a cancellation of membership is specifically requested, which seldom happens.

I asked Father Masi, a parish priest of a Roman church (a classmate at the Pontifical Gregorian University), “How many members do you have in your parish?” He sadly replied: “Well, in our parish register there are over 16,000 names, but those who attend Mass services on Sunday are only between 150 and 200.” The situation of Father Masi’s parish is not unusual, but is rather reflective of much of Western Christianity. It represents a clear case of practical apostasy.

4. Some Causes of Apostasy

Liberalism. Various factors contribute to this massive apostasy. One of them is undoubtedly the spirit of the antichrist, manifested, as noted earlier, in liberal religious teachers who deny basic Biblical beliefs. Paul warned believers about this development when he wrote that prior to Christ’s “appearing . . . the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths” (2 Tim 4:1, 3-4 NIV).

Secular Quasi-Religions. Another important factor is the meteoric rise in our century of secular quasi-religions such as secularism, materialism, communism, and humanism. 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 Americas due to materialism.”²⁹

These various systems have grown enormously during this century. The same encyclopedia reports: “From a miniscule presence in 1900, a mere 0.2% of the globe, these systems have mushroomed to 20.8% of the globe by 1980. They are today increasing at the extraordinary rate of 8.5 million new converts each year and are likely to reach one billion adherents by the year 1984.”³⁰

The said reality is that “a large percentage of their members are the children, grandchildren or great-grandchildren of persons who in their lifetimes were practising Christians.” The encyclopedia concludes by noting: “No Christian strategist in 1900 had envisaged such a massive rate of defection from Christianity within its 19th-century heartlands.”³¹

Conclusion. The unprecedented apostasy of our time, 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. As materialism, secularism, and humanism lead many Christians to become “lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, holding the form of religion but denying the power of it” (2 Tim 3:4-5), we need to pray for grace and wisdom to continue to stand fast in the faith, while “awaiting our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ” (Titus 2:13).

PART FOUR

THE EVILDOER

The great pre-Advent apostasy is linked by Paul in 2 Thessalonians 2 to the appearance of “the man of lawlessness”: “that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed” (2 Thess 2:3). By linking the two together, Paul suggests that the man of lawlessness will arise out of apostasy. Presumably his appearance will cause apostasy to intensify, since the Apostle says, “The coming of the lawless one by the activity of Satan will be with all power and with pretended signs and wonders, and with all wicked deception for those who are to perish, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved” (2 Thess 2:9-10).

1. Characteristics of the Evildoer

Before attempting an identification of this eschatological personage whom Paul calls “the man of lawlessness,” it is important to understand his main characteristics as given in 2 Thessalonians 2:3-10.

(1) He will come out of the great pre-Advent apostasy since, we noticed, his appearance is tied to the coming of “the rebellion” (v. 3).

(2) He is a figure in whom rebellion and sin crystallize as indicated by his designation as “the man of lawlessness (2 Thess 2:3). This evildoer will be the incarnation of evil as Jesus was the incarnation of good.

(3) He is “the son of perdition” (2 Thess 2:3), a Semitic phrase (John 17:12; Is 57:4) used to denote his ultimate fate: destined to “eternal destruction and exclusion from the presence of the Lord” (2 Thess 19).

(4) He is the adversary of God who will attempt to abolish “every so-called god or object of worship” in favor of himself (2 Thess 2:4). In his reckless audacity, he will go as far as to take “his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God” (2 Thess 2:4). Presumably this means that he will attempt to usurp the honor and worship which are properly rendered only to God.

(5) He will be “revealed” after a certain restrainer is “out of the way” (2 Thess 2:6-7). The verb “will be revealed,” which is used three times (vv. 3, 6, 8) in deliberate contrast to the revelation of Jesus Christ (2 Thess 1:7), points to a definite time when the veil will be removed so that the true nature and work of the Evildoer will be disclosed. Both the verb “will be revealed” and the phrase “what is restraining him” imply a prior, secret existence of the Evildoer before his manifestation.

(6) The “coming” (*parousia*) of the Evildoer is presented by Paul as a parody of the Second Coming of Christ. Like Christ, the Evildoer has a “coming” (2 Thess 2:9), a “revelation” (v. 3), a gospel which, however, “is false” (v. 11), and a claim to exclusive worship (v. 4). In imitation of Christ he will support his claim with “all power and with pretended signs and wonders” (v. 9). As Christ was empowered by God, so this Evildoer will be empowered by Satan (v. 9).

(7) The career of the Evildoer will be terminated at the Coming of Christ, who “will slay him with the breath of his mouth and destroy him by his appearing and his coming” (2 Thess 2:8).

2. Old Testament Background of the Evildoer

The above characteristics of the Evildoer pose an important question: From where did Paul learn about this eschatological personage? Christ predicted the arising of “false Christs and false prophets” (Matt 24:24) before His Return, but He made no specific mention of a Great Deceiver to appear as a prelude to His Parousia.

It is altogether possible that Paul received this information through special revelation. However, certain linguistic and conceptual similarities between Paul’s expression and expressions used in Daniel (7:25; 8:10-13; 11:36-37), Ezekial (28:1-19), and Isaiah (11:4; 14:3-23) suggest that the Apostle drew, at least in part, his description of the Evildoer from these three Old Testament sources.

Linguistic Similarities. Several linguistic similarities help to clarify this point. Paul’s phrase, “who . . . exalts himself against every so-called God . . .” (2 Thess 2:4), appears to be derived from Daniel’s description of the anti-God King of the North who “shall exalt himself and magnify himself above every god” (Dan 11:36).

Similarly, Paul’s expression “he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God” (2 Thess 2:4) is possibly drawn from the self-exaltation of the King of Tyre, who said: “I am a god, I sit in the seat of the gods” (Ezek 28:2). Paul’s description of the lawless one whom “the Lord

Jesus will slay with the breath of his mouth” (2 Thess 2:8) is strikingly similar to Old Testament prophetic descriptions of the destruction of the wicked by the Messiah: “with the breath of his lips he shall slay the wicked” (Is 11:4).

Conceptual Similarities. The similarities are not only linguistic but also conceptual. For example, the self-deification and doom of the kings of Babylon (Is 14:3-23) and Tyre (Ezek 28:1-19) find their correspondence in the self-deification and doom of the Evildoer (2 Thess 2:4, 8). A similar correspondence can be seen in the self-exaltation of Daniel’s little horn, who “shall speak words against the Most High” but who is “consumed and destroyed” at the end, when the Kingdom “shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High” (Dan 7:225-27).

How could Paul legitimately apply the doom-prophecies of Tyre and Babylon to the appearance and destruction of the End-time Evildoer? His justification is to be found primarily in the typological nature of these prophecies, that is to say, in the fact that they point beyond their immediate historical situation. For example, the divine punishment upon the king of Babylon is described as follows: “The Lord has broken the staff of the wicked, the scepter of rulers, . . . The whole earth is at rest and quiet; they break forth into singing” (Is 14:5, 7).

This description of global judgment, rest, peace, and rejoicing transcends the immediate historical outcome of the downfall of the King of Babylon, and thus it typifies the final retribution and restoration of the Day of the Lord. As William Neil explains: “All of these prophecies found their place in association with the Day of the Lord. This was to mark the complete downfall of all evil and oppression of the Jews and usher in the Golden Age.”³²

Historical Outline. The specific historical outline of 2 Thessalonians 2 (namely: power of lawlessness restrained, removal of restrainer, appearance of the lawless one, destruction of the latter by the Coming of Christ) could well have been suggested to Paul by the historical sequence of the prophecy found in Daniel 7. In Daniel, the anti-God “little horn” who “shall speak words against the Most High,” arises only after the downfall of the Roman Empire and its fragmentation into ten kingdoms (Dan 7:7-8, 24-25). His career is terminated by the coming of “the Ancient of Days” (Dan 7:22) who destroys him and establishes “an everlasting kingdom” (Dan 7:26, 27).

If Paul was guided in his prediction of pre-Advent events by Daniel’s prophetic sequence, then the mysterious “restrainer” (2 Thess 2:6-7) could well be the system of law and order embodied in the Roman government. On repeated occasions Paul had been delivered from angry crowds by the restraining authority of Roman officials (Acts 18:12-16 19:31; 23:23-30).

Thus he could speak of the Roman State as being “God’s servant for your good” (Rom 13:4).

The restraining function of law and order did not disappear when Rome fell, but is still present today. Paul apparently foresaw a future time when the basic structure of justice would break down—presumably as a result of withdrawal of divine restraining influence—and this would set the stage for the revelation of the man of lawlessness.

Old Testament Typological Prophecies. This attempted reconstruction of the Old Testament background of 2 Thessalonians 2 suggests that Paul presumably derived his prophetic outline of pre-Advent events from some Old Testament prophecies or at least found support in them. Under divine inspiration the Apostle possibly saw in the typology of the kings of Tyre and Babylon, and in the historical sequence of Daniel 7, allusions to a future and final rebellion (led by a Rebel) which would be suppressed by the Coming of Christ.

Paul’s prediction of pre-Advent events may then be rooted in Old Testament prophecies and prophetic typologies. This correlation of Old Testament typology and prophecy with New Testament eschatology is not an arbitrary Pauline innovation but is recognized by many scholars as common among apostolic writers. Hans K. LaRondelle rightly calls it “the apostolic principle [which] binds the OT and NT eschatologies together in an organic theological unity and thematic continuity.”³³

3. Mistaken Identifications of the Evildoer

The identification of Paul’s eschatological Evildoer has been the happy hunting-ground both of serious scholars and of eccentric theorizers. A brief consideration of some mistaken identifications will help in removing some misconceptions before attempting our identification.

Satan. The Evildoer cannot be identified directly with Satan since his “coming” is “by the activity of Satan” (v. 9). If the Evildoer is empowered by Satan to do mighty acts, then it is difficult to think that Paul intends to identify him directly with Satan himself.

An Emperor. The Evildoer cannot be identified with Nero nor with a line of emperors nor with dictators such as Stalin and Hitler. Though all of these have been manifestations of antichristian thought and action, and thus can be regarded as the forerunners of the End-time Evildoer, none of them have fulfilled the role of the eschatological Rebel by claiming the exclusive worship of themselves, or by counterfeiting the Coming of Christ with “pretended signs and wonders” (2 Thess 2:9), or by being slain by the breath of Christ’s mouth at His Return (2 Thess 2:8).

Beast of Revelation. The Evildoer cannot be identified directly with the beast out of the sea of Revelation 13 and 17 because, in spite of some similarities, there are significant differences. A first difference can be seen in their *nature*. The beast of Revelation 13 is primarily an antichristian politico-religious power (Rev 13:4, 12-15), as indicated by its seven heads and ten horns (Rev 13:1), which are explained to be past and future kings (Rev 17:10, 12). The Evildoer of 2 Thessalonians 2, on the other hand, is essentially a religious personage with no royal characteristics.³⁴

A second difference is the *duration* of their work. The beast is allowed to make war against the saints and to conquer them during a prophetic period of forty-two months (Rev 13:5-7). The Evildoer appears at the End-time, deceives only the unbelievers (2 Thess 2:10), and is soon destroyed by the Coming of Christ (v. 9).

A third difference is the *method* of their operation. While the beast uses coercion to bludgeon people into its service (Rev 13:7, 15), the Evildoer uses “wicked deception” (2 Thess 2:10). Summing up, we can say that while the beast is portrayed primarily as a politico-religious, antichristian power that will be active during Christian history, the Evildoer is pictured essentially as a religious deceiver who will appear just before Christ’s Return.

4. Identification of the Evildoer

Embodiment of Rebellion. In attempting an identification of “the Man of Lawlessness”, dogmatism is not in order. The passage is problematic because of its fragmentary information, due to Paul’s assumption of a knowledge of what he had already taught orally. What appears reasonably clear is that Paul predicted the coming of a final, climactic apostasy out of which would arise a personage who will be the supreme embodiment of rebellion against God. He will claim to be God and expect to be worshipped as the only true God.

Empowered by Satan, this Evildoer will perform deceptive miracles and wonders, presumably designed to counterfeit the Coming of Christ. His “wicked deception” will carry away many unbelievers. The career of this eschatological Rebel will not last long because it will be terminated by the Coming of Christ, who “will slay him with the breath of his mouth and destroy him by his appearing” (2 Thess 2:8).

Person or Principle? Obviously no past historical person matches the characteristics of this unique personage. There is little doubt that his appearance is still future since his career is terminated by the Coming of Christ. The question then is: Who is this Evildoer who is still to come? Is he a human person or a superhuman being or an intensification of the power of evil?

The last option at first appears the most plausible because Paul speaks of “the secret power of lawlessness [which] is already at work” (2 Thess 2:7, NIV). This has led some to conclude that “the coming of the lawless one” (v. 9) is an intensification of the present forces of evil which will grow into a great apostasy and rebellion against God.

The weakness of this interpretation is that it ignores the *personal* characteristics of this eschatological figure. Not only is he called “the *man* of lawlessness,” “the *son* of perdition,” but also he is described as the one “who opposes” and “exalts *himself* against every so-called god”; “*he* takes *his* seat in the temple of God, proclaiming *himself* to be God”; something is “restraining *him*” now but *he* will be “revealed in *his* time” and the “Lord Jesus will slay *him*” (2 Thess 2:3-6).

All of these personal characterizations cannot be dismissed as abstract personifications because they point unmistakably to a human person. At the same time, there is much in this description which cannot be reduced to a mere human person. For example, someone who exalts himself above every known deity, who usurps the worship, authority and name of God, is more than a mere human being.

This conclusion is further corroborated by the fact that the Evildoer first exists secretly and then is revealed openly when the restrainer is removed (2 Thess 2:6-8). The verb “will be revealed,” which is used three times (2 Thess 2:3, 6, 8), as Edmond Hiebert points out, “implies his prior existence on earth, for he will doubtless have been living many years before his manifestation as the man of sin.”³⁵

5. Conclusion

Incarnation of Satan. The above observations lead us to conclude that this eschatological Evildoer is a unique, unparalleled personage who presumably combines both human and superhuman characteristics. Before his personal appearance he exists as the power of evil (“the mystery [secret power] of lawlessness”—2 Thess 2:7), but prior to Christ’s Coming, this power of evil will incarnate itself in a real person as Christ was the true human incarnation of goodness.

This climactic incarnation of Satan is designed to deceive mankind into accepting him as the expected Savior. Empowered by Satan, this Evildoer will perform mighty acts and wonders which will succeed in deceiving many to accept him as the expected Lord.

Overmastering Deception. Ellen White describes with prophetic insight how “the great deceiver will make it appear that Christ has come.” She explains that he “will manifest himself among men as a majestic being of dazzling brightness, resembling the description of the Son of God given by John in the Revelation (Rev 1:13-15). The glory that surrounds him is unsurpassed by anything that mortal eyes have yet beheld. The shout of triumph rings out upon the air: ‘Christ has come! Christ has come!’ The people prostrate themselves in adoration before him, while he lifts his hands and pronounces a blessing upon them, as Christ blessed His disciples when He was upon the earth.”³⁶

Paul indicates that such an overmastering deception will carry away many unbelievers, but it will be met by the judgment of Christ, who will destroy this Great Deceiver by the splendor of His appearance and by “the breath of his mouth” (2 Thess 2:8).

The fulfillment of this sign still lies in the future. No one can tell how long it will be before this great deceptive Evildoer, predicted by Paul, will appear. We have found that an important precondition of his appearance—namely, the final apostasy—is already showing signs of fulfillment. This leads us to believe that his appearance is not far in the future.

Our present need is to recognize and withstand by divine grace “the secret power of lawlessness [which] is already at work” (2 Thess 2:7), so that when the Great Deceiver will appear, we shall not be led astray (Matt 24:24).

PART FIVE

INCREASED WICKEDNESS

1. Christ’s Prediction

Noah’s and Lot’s Times. In His Olivet Discourse, Christ predicted that social wickedness would increase prior to His Return: “Because of *the increase of wickedness*, the love of most will grow cold” (Matt 24:12, NIV).³⁷ In the same discourse Jesus exemplified the pre-Advent social wickedness by referring to two periods of Old Testament history, namely, the “days of Noah” and “the days of Lot.”

“Just as it was in the days of Noah, so also will it be in the days of the Son of Man. People were eating, drinking, marrying and being given in marriage up to the day Noah entered the ark. Then the flood came and destroyed them all. It was the same in the days of Lot. People were eating and drinking,

buying and selling, planting and building. But the day Lot left Sodom, fire and sulfur rained down from heaven and destroyed them all. It will be just like this on the day the Son of Man is revealed” (Luke 17:26-30; NIV; cf. Matt 24:37-39).

The two examples of Noah’s and Lot’s times are used by Christ to stress two points. First, the wicked will be overtaken by the sudden and unexpected judgement of His Advent in the same way as the Flood and the destruction of Sodom overtook the people of Noah’s and Lot’s times. Second, people will act “in the days” before His Second Coming very much the same way as they did “in the days” of Noah and of Lot.

The latter is indicated by the use of the plural form “*days* of the Son of Man,” which denotes the age preceding His Return, as “the days” of Noah and Lot refer to the age before the Flood and the destruction of Sodom. The parallelism is evident. Note that the singular form is used (“on the *day*”— Luke 17:30) to designate the actual day of Christ’s Coming. In other words, by these two examples Jesus illustrates not only the sudden judgment that will come upon impenitent mankind “*on the day*” of His Return, but also the social conditions that will prevail “*in the days*” before His Coming.

Godlessness and Wickedness. The social conditions of Noah’s and Lot’s times are described by a series of verbs (imperfect tense) expressing customary actions: they “were eating, drinking, marrying . . . buying and selling, planting and building.” None of these activities are wrong in themselves. What is wrong is that the people in those days lived *only* to satisfy their appetites and material desires. God and godliness had no place in their lives.

In the mad search for pleasure and prosperity, mankind sank into such great depravity that, the Scripture says, “every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (Gen 6:5; cf. 18:20-21). Jesus referred to the godlessness and wickedness of these ancient times to illustrate the alarming social conditions that would prevail before His Return.

2. Paul’s Prediction

Last-Days Godlessness. The importance of this Advent sign was recognized by New Testament believers. Paul, for example, warns Timothy about the godlessness of the last days, saying: “But mark this: 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 the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God—having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with them” (2 Tim 3:1-5, NIV).

This shocking prediction of the social wickedness of the last days reads like an accurate description of our time. Obviously Paul already saw the incipient fulfillment of this sign in his time. He mentions in 2 Thessalonians that “the secret power of lawlessness is already at work” (2:7), and warns Timothy to “have nothing to do with them” (2 Tim 3:5), that is, with the evil people just described.

Intensification. Though Paul recognized that lawlessness already prevailed, he foresaw an intensification of it before Christ’s Return. In 2 Thessalonians he speaks of a pre-Advent climactic apostasy and of the appearance of the Eildoer. Here in 2 Timothy, Paul predicts that in the last days “there *will be* terrible times” because “people *will be* lovers of themselves, . . . rather than lovers of God” (3:1-2, 4, NIV).

The consistent use of the future tense suggests that Paul foresaw a deterioration of social conditions before the End. He indicates this also in verse 13 where he says: “evil men and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceivers and deceived.” It is in this setting that the prediction of Christ and Paul about increased wickedness in “the last days” takes on added meaning for our time. To appreciate the timeliness of this Advent sign, we shall briefly look into some aspects of the wickedness of our time.

3. Contemporary Fulfillment

Surge in World Crime. A significant fulfillment of “the increase of wickedness” (Matt 24:12, NIV) predicted by Christ can be seen in today’s surge in crime in many countries. Among the reasons given by Paul for the “terrible times” to come “in the last days” are that people will be “without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God” (2 Tim 3:3-4, NIV). The fulfillment of this prediction is unparalleled today as crime, for example, 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 . . . Crime is becoming more violent. More criminals are using firearms, even in nations where gun control is strict.”³⁸

The report continues by surveying the crime problem in various countries of the world. All countries which publish statistical reports show a frightening increase in killings, assaults, rapes, robberies, and burglaries.

Surge in American Crime. The United States leads the world not only in science and technology, but, sadly to say, also in violence, crime, and delinquency. Figures released by the Federal Bureau of Investigation for the year 1980 indicate that in that year 23,000 persons were murdered, 82,000 women were raped, more than 500,000 persons were robbed, and 650,000 plus were assaulted.³⁹

Violent crimes have quadrupled in America since 1960. To bring home the intensity of violent crime in America today, *U.S. News & World Report* gives the following “Clock Ticks” statistics: “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.”⁴⁰

The unprecedented rise of violent crimes in America is reflected in the population explosion of State and Federal prisons. From 196,429 in 1970, the inmate population has grown, according to the U.S. Department of Justice, to 329,122 in 1980, an increase of 68 percent in 10 years.⁴¹ This alarming increase of violent crime is causing a paralyzing fear in the American society. “Fear, pure and simple, is behind the new advocacy of the death penalty,” writes *Time*.⁴²

Conclusion. The escalation of various forms of crime, which is causing a paralyzing fear in many parts of the world, represents in our view a significant fulfillment of Christ’s prediction regarding the increased wickedness before His Return. Many persons today, as Christ predicted, are “fainting with fear and with foreboding of what is coming on the world” (Luke 21:26). The frightening increase in wickedness points to the impending judgment which Christ will soon execute upon evildoers at His Coming.

PART SIX

AGE OF APPETITE

Another important social condition given by Christ as a characteristic sign of the age preceding His Second Coming is the indulgence in appetite, gluttony, and drunkenness. “Eating and drinking” as if there was no tomorrow was characteristic of the days of Noah and Lot, and, according to Christ, so “will it be in the days of the Son of man” (Luke 17:26). Paul confirms Christ’s prediction when he says: “in the last days . . . men will be lovers of self, . . . lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God” (2 Tim 3:2-4).

In every age there have been pleasure-seekers whose main goal in life has been to satisfy their appetites. Today, however, this hedonistic trend has greatly increased because, as a result of scientific and technological advancements, many persons, especially in developed countries, enjoy more leisure time and economic prosperity than at any other period of history.

A generation ago most people had to work so much for so little that little time and energy were left for pleasure-seeking. Today the situation has drastically changed as more and more people can enjoy increased personal income and more free time, which are often spent in eating, drinking, and pleasure-seeking.

1. Indulgence in Eating

Overeating. The paradox of our time is that while lack of food destroys millions of persons in poor countries, too much eating devastates the lives of millions in affluent societies. According to the American Medical Association, 40 percent of the American population is overweight.⁴³ The stored fat of adult Americans is estimated by anthropologist George Armelagos of the University of Massachusetts at 2.3 trillion pounds—about 14.3 pounds of fat for every person in America 18 and over. Armelagos estimates that such an amount of fat could provide “enough energy to fuel 900,000 automobiles for 12,000 miles for one year.”⁴⁴

Millions of overeaters today are worried by the health hazards of their overweight, such as diabetes, hypertension, heart and kidney diseases and emotional trauma. To shed the excess weight, billions of dollars are spent each year on diet pills, books, weight-control programs, and in some cases, surgery.

Weight-control programs have become a multi-billion-dollar industry. Weight Watchers International, for example, according to *U.S. New & World Report* “conducts 17,000 lectures a week for more than 550,000 dieters in the U.S. and 28 other countries.” Another organization, Overeaters Anonymous, “has more than 100,000 members in 5,600 groups in the U.S. and in 54 countries.” Its aim is to help people “stop compulsive overeating.”⁴⁵

Food Consumption. Eating and drinking have become today both the pastime and the problem of the rich minority of the world. North Americans, Europeans, Russians, and Japanese devour an unfair share of the world’s available food. Americans, for example, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, consume annually 1,463 pounds of food per person of which 624 pounds are animal products.⁴⁶ This represents five times the annual food consumption per person in developing countries.

The difference between rich and poor countries is even more glaring when one compares the per capita meat consumption. For example, the per capita annual meat consumption for 1979 was 259 pound in Australia, 245 in the United States, 237 in Argentina, 207 in Canada. In developing countries, however, meat consumption is minimal if not totally absent.⁴⁷

Considering that it takes seven to ten pounds of grain to produce one pound of beef, countries with high meat consumption indirectly consume a much larger quantity of food. The livestock of the rich countries, according to a report of the United Nations, eats as much grain as do all the people of India and China.⁴⁸ This means that to satisfy the craving of rich nations for meat, millions of tons of grain, which could feed the hungry, are fed to livestock. This fact brings home the timeliness of Jesus' prediction that before His Coming many would be obsessed with "eating and drinking."

2. Indulgence in Drinking

Drinking must have been a problem in Noah's time, because soon after the Flood Noah himself got drunk—a hint perhaps of the influence his age left on him. Jesus said, "so will it be in the days of the Son of man" (Luke 17:26). That drinking is a major social problem needs no demonstration. The news media confront us every day with the tragic consequences of drinking. Most people, however, may not be aware of the extent of the problem.

A Global Problem. Generally, it is assumed that drinking is a problem primarily in industrialized nations. This assumption, however, is not correct. The *World Health Organization* (WHO) reports that "alcohol-related problems constitute an important obstacle to the socioeconomic development of a large number of developing countries and, in addition, are likely to overwhelm their health resources unless appropriate measures are taken."⁴⁹

The increase in the consumption of alcoholic beverages in recent years has been staggering in most countries of the world. According to the WHO report, "In 25 countries with fairly complete statistics, annual per capita consumption of alcohol increased by between 30 and 500 percent."⁵⁰ The report lists among the major alcohol-related problems, "crime, traffic accidents, absenteeism and, as a consequence, low productivity." Alcohol is implicated "in 13 to 50 percent of rapes, 24 to 72 percent of assaults and 28 to 86 percent of homicides."⁵¹

Some Facts and Figures. Statistics hardly convey the human anguish and misery cause by drinking. Millions of lives and homes around the world are affected. In America, for example, alcoholism victimizes over ten million persons and "is a chief contributing factor to 75 percent of the divorces, 60

percent of the fatal automobile accidents, 50 percent of the homicides, and one-third of the suicides.”⁵² According to the National Safety Council, in 1980 alone 26,300 were killed by drunk drivers, which is far more than those killed in all other forms of accidents.

Drunk driving, according to *Newsweek*, has become “a national epidemic, . . . a socially accepted form of murder. More Americans have died at the hands of drunk drivers during the past two years than were killed in Vietnam; on average, about three Americans are killed and 80 are injured by drunk drivers every hour of the day. The drunken slaughter over the past decade is a staggering one-quarter of a million Americans—the entire population of Rochester, New York. Safety experts say that one out of two Americans will be victimized by a drunk driver in his lifetime.”⁵³

Conclusion. The excessive eating and drinking of our time, which are causing untold human suffering and deaths, represent a unique pre-Advent sign. They tell us that we are living at the time predicted by Christ, when, as in the days of Noah, many are abandoning any self-restraint in their search for self-gratification. They show us that we are living “in the last days” predicted by Paul when many would be “lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God” (2 Tim 3:4).

PART VII

AGE OF SEX

1. The Days of Noah and of Lot

Jesus characterized the days of Noah not only as an age of appetite (“eating and drinking”) but also as an age of six: they were “marrying and being given in marriage” (Luke 17:27, NIV). To marry and be married (the passive in the case of the woman) are perfectly moral acts. Marriage is a divine institution. The problem in the day of Noah and of Lot was the abuse of marriage. The Greek imperfect tense “they were marrying” suggests repeated marriages by the same person.

Sexual Indulgence. Possibly Jesus implies not only disregard for God’s order of monogamy but also sexual indulgence in general. This is suggested by the description of the age of Noah as the time when “the sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair; and they took them wives of all which they chose” (Gen 6:2, KJV). The text suggests indiscriminate marrying of several “wives” merely to satisfy lustful desires.

What was true in the days of Noah was even more true in the days of Lot. Genesis records that all the men of Sodom, “both young and old,” surrounded

Lot's house and shouted "Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us so that we can have sex with them" (Gen 19:5, NIV). It is shocking to read that not only the "old" but also the "young" were practicing homosexuality. Jude reminds us of God's punishment upon the people of Sodom and Gomorrah because they "acted immorally and indulged in unnatural lust" (Jude 7).

2. The Sexual Revolution

Jesus pointed to the sexual sins and moral depravity of the days of Noah and Lot to characterize the age preceding His Return. Similarly Paul predicted that "in the last day" many will be "without natural affection, . . . incontinent" (2 Tim 3:3 JKV). Our generation is witnessing the fulfillment of this Advent sign in an unprecedented way. The sexual revolution of our time has no parallel in history.

Sex Craze. 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, whether they be cars or clothes. To look "sexy" has become a prevailing aspiration. For the first time in history, sexual organs and intercourse are displayed for public enjoyment in pornographic magazines and books sold in public newsstands. An example of how far some magazines will go in portraying sexual experimentation is the March 1976 issue of *Hustler* which portrays film star Linda Lovelace having sex relations with a dog.

Sex shows are included today among the tourist attractions of major European cities. Sexual services are also openly advertized in many countries where prostitution is legal. In America, prostitution is illegal but "full services" are provided in new-style body shops and massage parlors with exotic names such as "Ecstasy," "Erotica," and "Velvet Touch." "Adult" bookstores, sex shows and nudity on stage are fast spreading across the country.

3. The Impact of the Sexual Revolution

Extramarital Sex. The total impact of the sexual revolution on our permissive society is hard to estimate. Marital relationships are being undermined as more and more husbands and wives seek for *extra* sexual experiences by engaging in extramarital sex.

In 1974 *The Redbook Magazine* conducted what is alleged to be one of the most thorough investigations of the American female. The survey of over 100,000 women, supervised by sociologist Robert Bell of Temple University,

indicates that “about one third of all married women who took part in the survey report having sexual relations with men other than their husbands.”⁵⁴ The percentage increases to *almost half* (47%) among wage-earning wives. Considering that men have always been more promiscuous than women, we can safely assume that the percentage of American married men having extramarital relations is even higher.

Divorce. A natural consequence of marital infidelities is the shocking rise of the divorce rate not only in America but in many other countries. Even though the United States does not lead the world in divorces (Sweden is ahead), it is stunning to look at its divorce statistics. According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, in 1970 there was 1 divorce for every 3.02 marriages. Ten years later, in 1980, the rate increased to 1 divorce for every 2.04 marriages. In some parts of California the rate is one divorce for every marriage.

What this means is that approximately 50 percent of American marriages contracted today terminate in divorce. Truly, as Paul predicted, many today have become “lovers of self, . . . lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God” (2 Tim 3:2, 3). When their marital partner fails to satisfy their social, financial, emotional, or sexual expectations, they prefer to simply scissor rather than endeavor to mend their marital relationship.

Marriage Aberrations. To maintain sexual freedom and avoid the trauma of a divorce, there are some who enter into “open marriages” which allow them the freedom to have sexual intimacy with other persons. Others engage in mate swapping, that is husband and wife agree to exchange partners with another couple for the purpose of having sexual relations. The *Redbook* survey indicates that 4 percent of the wives who responded to the survey had tried mate swapping.⁵⁵ Some sociologists estimate that 2.5 million couples in America exchange partners on a regular basis. Still others join “free-love” communes that espouse free sex. Others engage in “group sex.”

Incest. Perhaps the most appalling form of sexual gratification is that which victimizes children. Sometimes the child molestor is a stranger; in many cases, however, he is a member of the family. The latter case is known as incest. Reliable statistics on the incidence of sexual abuse of children are not available. Most authorities agree, however, that what is being reported is only the tip of the iceberg. In a recent college survey, 20 percent of the women and 9 percent of the men reported that they had been sexually victimized, many of them by their parents.⁵⁶

“In the past year,” write *Newsweek*, “two therapists and sociologists have concluded that incest verges on an epidemic . . . ‘We are talking about a major

public-health problem on the same scale as diabetes,' says Judith Lewis Herman, a Massachusetts psychiatrist."⁵⁷ In 1971 the reported cases of incest in the United States were said to be 100,000. Today's incidence is estimated to be three to four times that number.⁵⁸

4. Homosexuality

Another important form of sexual perversion common in our time is homosexuality. The first mention of this sin is found in Genesis 19:5 where we are told that the men of Sodom surrounded Lot's house and demanded him by force to hand over to them two male visitors that had arrived at his house so that they could "have sex with them." The name of the city became descriptive of male prostitution ("sin of sodomy"), which the Bible strongly condemns (Deut 23:17; 2 Kings 23:7; Jude 7).

The Biblical condemnation of homosexuality as sin and perversion of God's intended function of sex is vigorously attacked by aggressive organizations such as the Gay Liberation Movement. These organizations have come out of their closets and turned their former shames into militant aggression. With much skill and determination they have succeeded in promoting homosexuality as simply another legitimate form of sexual relations. It is not surprising that they should have succeeded in our sex-obsessed society in winning considerable professional and popular approval. No amount of rationalization, however, can legitimize what God unequivocally condemns as sin.

The Extent of Homosexuality. It is difficult to estimate how widespread homosexuality and lesbianism are in our society, because many are still afraid to come out into the open for fear of harming their job security and receiving social rejection. The renowned Kinsey's study of American sexuality, published thirty years ago, reports that 37 percent of male and 13 percent of females had had at least one orgasmic homosexual experience. This study has come under considerable criticism because of its formulation, implementation, and interpretation.⁵⁹

Kinsey researchers have double-checked their findings in several different ways and concluded that, if anything, their 37 percent estimate was too low, since possibly as many as one half of the adult male population had had at least one homosexual experience.⁶⁰ Obviously, the percentage of habitual homosexuals is much smaller. A study reported in *New York Times* gives the figure of 5 percent of males and 4 percent of females who prefer homosexuality.⁶¹ According to most estimates, the homosexual population of San Francisco exceeds 100,000.

Whatever the exact percentage of homosexuals might be, their presence and influence in unquestionably increasing. *Newsweek* reports that in the United States “hundreds of gay groups operate on campuses around the country, providing everything from housing advice to incoming gay freshmen, to an emerging old-boy network to place gay graduates. At the University of Wisconsin at Madison, gay events are as commonplace as the homecoming football game. Perhaps 1,000 gays and lesbians live openly on the 40,000-student campus, and “The United,” a four-year-old gay-student organization and social-service agency, has 150 regular volunteers.”⁶²

A number of women interviewed by *Newsweek* said that they “were not homosexual when they came to college and may not be after they leave.”⁶³ In other words, some engage in homosexual relations just as “an experimental phase” while at college, to be able to enjoy sex without the risk of pregnancy.

Social Tolerance. The prevailing climate of tolerance in colleges and communities encourages this kind of experimentation. When some politicians, sport, and film stars openly profess to be homosexual, it is not surprising that some young people want to experiment, too.

Some may reason that if even ordained ministers are homosexual and if gay “churches” are springing up, then homosexuality must not be sinful after all.⁶⁴ This reasoning is obviously fallacious because no amount of social tolerance and approval can remove God’s condemnation and final judgment upon those who indulge “in unnatural lust” (Jude 7). Jude reminds us that the fates of Sodom and Gomorrah “serve as an example” of the punishment that awaits those who act likewise (Jude 7).

5. Abortion

Extent of Abortion. Perhaps the most tragic consequence of the sexual obsession and permissiveness of our society is the appalling number of unborn babies being aborted in every country of the world. The increase has been facilitated by the legalization of abortion in many countries. “In Denmark and Sweden, even minors can have abortions on request—without parental approval.”⁶⁵

The Netherlands has become an abortion haven for women from countries where abortion is not yet legalized.⁶⁶ The number of legal abortions performed in the United States in 1980 was more than 1.5 million (1,554,000 to be more exact).⁶⁷ These constitute one fourth of all the pregnancies. In other words, in the United States, one of every four unborn babies is deliberately eliminated. Statistics from many countries are difficult to obtain, but the ongoing abortion debate in the world press indicates that abortion is becoming a serious problem in many countries.⁶⁸

Some Causes. This incredible suppression of unborn children raises a disturbing question: How can such a thing happen in Christian countries such as the United States? An important answer is to be found in the prostitution of the divine gift of sex: a gift God gave to humanity to procreate and to enable marital partners to become symbolically one by expressing and experiencing total, exclusive, and mutual commitment in self-giving of themselves to one another.

The sexual revolution has attacked this divine purpose for sex, promoting it instead as a means for self-gratification. Sexual partners, whether of the same or the opposite sex, whether adult or innocent children, are viewed as disposable objects needed to achieve momentary satisfaction.

This “free love” philosophy has greatly influenced especially young people, many of whom have come to regard sexual intercourse as a socially accepted way to have fun. The *Redbook* survey mentioned earlier indicates that 90 percent of American women under 25 have had premarital intercourse.⁶⁹ This represents a 200 percent increase since 1953, when Kinsey found that only 33 percent of the same age group had had premarital intercourse.

Some Consequences. The shocking increase in premarital and extramarital intercourse has several tragic consequences. First, there is the terrible loss of the sacred meaning of the sexual act, a beautiful symbol of the total, unreserved self-giving and commitment of husband and wife to one another. This beautiful, sacred meaning is lost in promiscuous sexual relations.

Second, there is the human anguish and misery of those who experience unwanted pregnancies. Over 1.1 million American teenagers become pregnant every year, causing them either to have abortions or to interrupt their education and to become a burden to their parents and society.⁷⁰

Third, there is the tragedy of over 1.5 million unborn American babies killed every year, one third of whom are babies of teenagers.⁷¹ When one adds to this figure the many more million unborn babies aborted every year around the world, it is mind-boggling to think what price potential babies are paying for the irresponsible sexual conduct of millions of persons. It is evident that not all abortions represent irresponsible sexual behavior. There are cases such as incest, rape, or health which may make abortion the only viable solution.

How long, one wonders, will God allow this evil to continue? The Scripture reminds us that there is a limit to God’s mercy (Gen 15:16). As the Lord brought judgment upon the wicked generations of Noah’s and Lot’s times, the signs of increasing wickedness just surveyed give us reason to

believe that soon He will come again to execute judgment upon the evildoers and to restore order, peace, love, and justice upon this earth.

CONCLUSION

Several conclusions emerge from this study of the signs of opposition to God. First personal and impersonal messiahs have arisen in our time, as Christ predicted, deceiving millions of persons around the world. Second, the predicted Antichrist is present today in the persons of influential religious teachers who deny some of the very basic Biblical beliefs.

Third, the sign of the final apostasy predicted by Paul is already visible in the massive defections from Christianity in the Western world caused by such factors as materialism, atheism, humanism, secularism, and Communism. Fourth, the predicted “increase of wickedness” is already manifest in the alarming surge of violent crimes which is paralyzing our society.

Lastly, Christ’s characterization of the time before His Coming as an age of indulgence in appetite, drunkenness, and sex finds an amazing fulfillment in our society where food, drink, and sex have become a prevailing obsession. The unparalleled fulfillment of these Advent signs in our time gives us reasons to believe that Christ’s Return “is near, at the very gates” (Matt 24:33).

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Chapter 10

SIGNS OF DIVINE JUDGMENT AND THE ADVENT HOPE

Disasters can have a sobering effect upon the human mind. When a war breaks out, or an earthquake destroys countless lives and property, or a drought burns the crops and dries up the water supply, or an epidemic disease victimizes millions of persons, many people will call out to God either in curse or prayer.

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 everywhere for the prophet Elijah (1 Kings 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. Now therefore, forgive my sin, I pray you, only this once, and entreat the Lord your God only to remove this death from me” (Ex 10:16-17).

In His Olivet Discourse Jesus predicted that certain calamities would occur before His Return. Because of their nature and function, we shall call these calamities “signs of divine judgment.” 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 not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places: all this is but the beginning of the sufferings” (Matt 24:6-8; cf. Mark 13:7-8). Luke adds “pestilences” to the listing of calamities (Luke 21:11).

Objective of Chapter. This chapter examines the relevance of the signs of divine judgment for our times. The study is divided into two parts. The first part briefly defines the overall Biblical significance of calamities. The second part will give more specific attention to the meaning and manifestation of each calamity predicted by Christ. These will be examined in the following sequence:

1. Wars and Rumors of War
2. Natural Disasters
3. Man-made Disasters
4. Famines
5. Pestilences

PART ONE

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF CALAMITIES

1. A Revelation of Divine Judgment

Three observations should be made regarding the significance of the signs of divine judgment given by Christ. First, these signs evidence divine judgment upon the human wickedness discussed in the previous chapter. The Old Testament prophets, as shown earlier, frequently speak of the destruction caused by war, earthquakes, famines, and pestilences, as being a manifestation of divine judgment upon the wickedness of Gentile nations or of Israel (Is 13-27; 63:1-6; Jer 29:17-23; chaps. 46-51).

A Call to Repentance. The manifestation of divine judgment through calamities is intended to summon people to repent. The prophet Joel, for example, describes a disastrous drought and fire which destroyed the harvest, the pasture, and the trees and dried up the water brooks (Joel 1:11-12, 19-20). In the context of this calamity, the prophet calls upon the people to repent: “Awake, you drunkards, and weep; and wail, all you drinkers of wine, . . . Sanctify a fast, call a solemn assembly. Gather the elders and all the inhabitants of the land to the house of the Lord your God; and cry to the Lord” (Joel 1:5, 14).

This does not mean that those who suffer or die because of these disasters are singled out by God as deserving special punishment. Jesus refuted this fallacious reasoning by explaining that those eighteen persons who were killed by the collapse of Siloam’s tower were no worse offenders than the rest of the people in Jerusalem (Luke 13:4). That tragedy, however, was to bring home the important lesson that “unless you repent you will all likewise perish” (Luke 13:5). “These startling calamities,” writes Ellen White, “were designed to lead them to humble their hearts, and repent of their sins.”¹

Announcement of the Final Judgment. Disasters, however, are used by God not only to summon people to repentance, but also to announce His final judgment which, as already noted, is associated with the Day of the Lord in the Old Testament and with the Day of Christ’s Coming in the New Testament. For example, Joel sees the historical famine described above as a sign that “the day of the Lord is near, and as destruction from the Almighty it comes” (Joel 1:15).

In the prophetic perspective, disasters such as wars, earthquakes, and famines not only reveal God's immediate judgment upon human ungodliness and wickedness (Rom 1:18), but are also harbingers of the final judgment to come. They constantly remind mankind that the Judge is standing at the doors (James 5:9). "Every report of calamity by sea or land," states Ellen White, "is a testimony to the fact that the end of all things is at hand."²

2. A Pledge of the Certainty of the End

A second noteworthy aspect of calamities is that they serve to point to the certainty of the approaching End. Jesus spoke of wars, earthquakes, famines, and pestilences as disasters occurring not exclusively at the very end but during the whole time preceding His Return. This point is implied in the admonition not to be alarmed by the occurrence of these signs "for this must take place, but *the end is not yet*" (Matt 24:6; Mark 13:7; Luke 21:9). In fact, these signs are said to represent "*but the beginning of the sufferings*" (Matt 24:8; Mark 13:8).³

The latter expression was used in Judaism in a technical way to describe the period of suffering ("the birth-pangs of the Messiah") that would precede the establishment of the messianic Kingdom.⁴ Possibly Jesus made use of this familiar concept to characterize the conditions that will precede His Return. The occurrence of wars, earthquakes, famines, and pestilences does not pinpoint but point to the approaching End. They constitute a pledge that the End will surely come.

3. Intensification of Disasters

A third observation is that disasters will intensify before the End. By saying that wars, earthquakes, famines, and pestilences are "*but the beginning of the sufferings*" (Matt 24:8; Mark 13:8), Christ clearly implied that they will intensify as the End approaches. "But the beginning 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).

Christ's prediction of the intensification of calamities before the End finds support in the prophetic books of the Old and New Testaments. These books, as will be shown, predict an intensification of warfare and disasters prior to the Coming of the Lord.

In the light of the above observations, attention will now be given to each of the signs of divine judgment predicted by Christ. The procedure of this study consists first in defining the Biblical teaching regarding each of the

signs of divine judgment and, second, in verifying the extent of their fulfillment in our time. An overall conclusion will be drawn at the end of the chapter.

PART TWO

THE SIGNS OF DIVINE JUDGMENT

I. Wars and Rumors of Wars

The first sign of divine judgment given by Christ in His Olivet Discourse 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 sufferings” (Matt 24:6-8; cf. Mark 13:7-8).

To appreciate the significance of this Advent sign for our time, consideration will be given first to the prophetic teaching regarding the End-time intensification of warfare and then to its application to our contemporary situation.

1. Intensification of Warfare

Jesus alluded to the intensification of wars and other disasters when He described them as “but the beginning of the sufferings” (Matt 24:6-8). What Jesus expressed implicitly, other prophetic writers explain explicitly. A few examples will be cited to show the existence of a common prophetic understanding of the End-time intensification of warfare and disasters.

Daniel. In the visions of chapter 2 and 7, Daniel sees a succession of kingdoms in which warfare intensifies in extent, brutality, and destruction. The fourth kingdom is presented as a political power that “shall devour the whole earth, and trample it down, and break it to pieces” (7:23; cf. 2:40). Similarly, in chapter 12:1 Daniel speaks of a final “time of trouble, such as never has been since there was a nation till that time” (cf. Dan 8:23-24).

Revelation. The intensification of warfare before the Coming of Christ is portrayed dramatically in several visions of the book of Revelation. In the vision of the Four Horsemen, each of the four horses that appears at the opening of the first four seals depicts in a crescendo the intensification of war and of its consequences.

The White Horse that goes out “to conquer” (Rev 6:2), points to war as a means of *conquest*. The Red Horse that “was permitted to take peace from the earth, so that men should slay one another” (Rev 6:4) obviously symbolizes the *bloodshed* caused by wars. The Black Horse carrying “a balance in his hand” (Rev 6:5-6) represents *scarcity*, acute famine conditions caused by

wars. The last, a Pale Horse, as the name of its rider (“Death”) indicates, symbolizes *death* (Rev 6:7-8), which is caused by “sword, . . . famine, . . . pestilence, and . . . wild beasts.”

Intensification and Limitation. The various means used by the last horse to cause death suggest an intensification of the destructiveness of war. The extent of the destruction is indicated by the expression “a fourth of the earth” (Rev 6:8). This phrase expresses not only the intensification but also the limitation placed by God upon the destructiveness of war. The Lord will not allow wars to destroy the whole earth. It is His Coming that will cause the final and complete destruction of the wicked.

The last point is further clarified by the opening of the next two seals. The vision of wars causing conquest (white horse), bloodshed (red), scarcity (black), and death (pale) is followed by the vision of the martyrs (fifth seal) who cry: “O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before thou wilt judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell upon the earth?” (Rev 6:10). The answer to this question is given at the opening of the following (sixth) seal through the cataclysmic Coming of Christ who brings shock and destruction upon kings, great men, generals, rich, strong, and every one (cf. Rev 6:15).

Human history is brought to an end not by the intensification of human warfare but by the final visitation of “him who is seated on the throne” (Rev 6:16). In the light of these observations we conclude, as noted by George E. Ladd and by numerous commentators, that “there is a similarity between the structure of the seven seals and the Olivet Discourse.”⁵ In both places the Coming of Christ is preceded by wars and calamities which will intensify before the End, causing the great tribulation (seven trumpets and plagues).

Armageddon. The extension and intensification of wars before the Coming of Christ are depicted in Revelation also in conjunction with the sixth plague, which describes the preparation for a final eschatological battle, known as the battle of “Armageddon” (Rev 16:14-16). “Demonic spirits” are presented as going “abroad to the kings of the whole world, to assemble them for battle on the great day of God the Almighty” (Rev 16:14).

Henry B. Swete comments” “There have been times when nations have been seized by a passion for war which the historian can but imperfectly explain. It is such an epoch that the Seer foresees, but one which, unlike any that has come before it, *will involve the whole world in war.*”⁶ The preparation for this worldwide war takes place just prior to the Coming of Christ, which is clearly described in the following verse by the familiar metaphor of the “thief”: “Lo, I am coming like a thief!” (Rev 16:15).

Old Testament Prophets. This prediction of a final worldwide military conflict before the End can be traced back to Old Testament prophets. Joel foretells the coming of a great and terrible Day of the Lord (Joel 2:11) when God would gather all the nations in the valley of Jehoshaphat and execute judgment upon them (Joel 3:2). Similar description of a final conflict involving a gathering of nations against Israel are found in Zechariah 14:1-5 and Ezekiel 38, 39. God intervenes in this climactic global conflict, executing judgment upon the ungodly nations of the world.

A Christocentric Perspective. The ethnic and geographic aspect of these Old Testament prophecies are transformed by John in Revelation into a Christocentric perspective. To put it simply, the forecast by Israel's prophets of a final conflict of nations, which are destroyed by the Lord when He comes to establish His messianic Kingdom, become in John's Revelation the final worldwide conflict (Armageddon), which is brought to an end by the Coming of the "King of kings and Lord of lords," who destroys all the evildoers (Rev 19:14-21) and inaugurates a "new heaven and a new earth" (Rev 21:1).

This brief survey suffices to show that there exists an organic unity between the teachings of Christ and those of the prophets regarding an intensification of wars and disasters prior to the final Coming of the Lord.

2. Twentieth-Century Wars

Has mankind experienced in the twentieth century a unique fulfillment of the pre-Advent intensification of wars and other predicted disasters? Some would answer negatively because wars and disasters have been the sad reality in every period of human history. No one can dispute the fact that wars have plagued mankind in every age. They represent the most tangible evidence of the demonic influence upon this present world order. As such they have been a sign to believers in every age, reassuring them that "the strife will not be long this day the noise of battle, the next the victor's song."

Globality and Destructiveness. The recognition of the presence of wars in every age must not obscure an equally self-evident fact, namely, their *globality* and increasing *destructiveness* in our century. It is only in our twentieth century that two world wars have been fought which have no parallel in the annals of history as far as geographic extension and destruction of human lives and property are concerned.

World War I. Almost thirty nations took part in World War I, which as Peter Young, professor at the Royal Military Academy in Sandhurst, England, points out, "took the lives of twice as many men as all the major wars

from 1790 to 1913 put together.”⁷ The total number of military personnel killed or missing during World War I was about 9,000,000. “The number of civilian deaths in areas of actual war totaled about 5,000,000.”⁸ The Spanish influenza, which according to some authorities was caused by the war, took additional tens of millions of lives.

The loss of millions of human lives must be added the millions of displaced refugees, especially from Eastern Europe and the Balkans, who moved helplessly from place to place in search of food, shelter, and clothing also the destruction of industrial and community life in countless cities, towns, and villages. Mankind had never before experienced a war causing such an incredible destruction of human lives and property as World War I.

World War II. It is hard to comprehend that hardly twenty years would pass after the end of World War I before World War II broke out, a war that caused far greater human and material losses than World War I or any other previous war. Theodore Ropp, author of *War in the Modern World*, graphically states that “World War II killed more persons, cost more money, damaged more property, affected more people, and probably caused more far-reaching changes than any other war in history.”⁹ More than 50 countries took part in that war which caused the death of over 55 million civilian and military persons.

No other war ever caused so much damage to key industries, transportation, and housing in so many parts of the world as World War II. Bombing, artillery fire, and street fighting devastated such major cities as Berlin, Dresden, Warsaw, Budapest, Hiroshima, Tokyo, London, Milan. Never before had mankind experienced such a global devastation on such a massive scale. The globality and destructiveness of the two world wars, which have caused more casualties and suffering than all the previous wars of history combined, represent, in our view, an unparalleled fulfillment of the predicted intensification and expansion of war before Christ’s Coming.

World War III? Are the two World Wars already witnessed in this century a prelude to another worldwide conflict (World War III), which possibly could be the final battle of Armageddon (Rev 16:14-16)? Some reject such a prospect. They view the forty years of relative peace that have passed since the end of World War II as an indication that mankind has learned a lesson from the past and will not engage in another worldwide conflict.

It is difficult to share this optimism, for at least two important reasons. First, World War II has not eradicated war. In spite of the creation of the United Nations on October 24, 1945, to enforce a lasting peace, “since the end

of World War II, there have been some 140 conflicts in which perhaps ten million people have been killed.”¹⁰

A survey reported by *U.S. News & World Report* notes that even today “at a time when much of the world seems to be at peace, no fewer than a fourth of the nations around the globe are caught up in armed conflict. More than 40 countries are involved in hostilities of one form or another that have claimed as many as 5 million lives . . . All around the globe, fighting never ends.”¹¹

The report continues with a brief survey of the 40 wars presently going on in the Mideast, Persian Gulf, Far East, Latin America, Africa, and Europe. The information is drawn from a study done by the Center for Defence Information and aptly entitled “A World at War—1983.” In the light of the present proliferation of national and revolutionary wars, it is hard to discount the possibility of a new world conflict breaking out sometime in the future.

The Nuclear Threat. A second reason for our lack of optimism about the non-occurrence of a future world conflict is the new threat posed by the present race for the production of increasingly sophisticated nuclear weapons. One pundit wisely remarked “perhaps splitting the atom was not such a wise crack after all!”

The implications of the splitting of the atom are explained in a simple but frightening way by Jonathan Schell in his 1982 best-seller, *The Fate of the Earth*. Schell’s argument is simple: The splitting of the atom made nuclear weapons inevitable, nuclear weapons make nuclear war inevitable, and nuclear war means the end of the human race therefore we must eliminate nuclear weapons before they eliminate us.¹²

Schell’s “solution” to the nuclear threat has been highly criticized as utopian. His call for the abolition of violence, nuclear arms, and nation states, and for the establishment of a world community where international disputes are settled peaceably, presupposes a radical moral transformation of human nature which no human program has ever accomplished (Jer 17:9; 13:23).

Protests Against War. Recognizing the impossibility of abolishing nuclear weapons and frightened by their increasing threat to mankind, thinkers of all walks of life are actively campaigning against the threat of a nuclear holocaust. Some are urging the adoption of a policy of no-first-use of nuclear arms. Others are calling for a global and verifiable freeze on nuclear arms. Still others are urging a gradual reduction of the nuclear arsenals.¹³

The Peace Movement that is burgeoning in the U.S.A. and Western Europe—drawing up to half-a-million people in major recent rallies—is urging the Soviet Union and the United States to freeze their nuclear arsenals

at present levels. Some even call for unilateral nuclear disarmament by the United States. A similar call for banning the use of nuclear weapons was recently issued by Catholic Bishops in their historic pastoral letter.

Arms Race. These various forms of protest against war and of pleas for peace remind us of Paul's warning: "While people are saying, 'Peace and safety,' destruction will come on them suddenly" (1 Thess 5:3, NIV). While millions of persons today are calling for nuclear disarmament and peace, the race to improve the delivery system and the destructiveness of nuclear weapons goes on unabated.

A 1982 United Nations study on nuclear weapons reports that "there are probably more than 40,000 nuclear warheads in the world today. The total explosive strength may be equivalent to about 1 million Hiroshima bombs, or more than 3 tons of TNT for every man, woman, and child on earth . . . Some 50 million people are, directly or indirectly, engaged in military activities worldwide."¹⁴ "Total world expenditures for military purposes are estimated to have reached \$455 billion in 1980. This represents a fourfold increase, in real terms, since the end of the Second World War . . . what is spent annually on military activities is equivalent to \$110 for every man, woman, and child on earth."¹⁵

Future Prospects. Against this background we ask: What are the prospects for a nuclear war to engulf many nations? Most analysts predict that the greatest peril of a nuclear war could come not from a direct clash between the Soviet Union and the United States, but rather from conflicts between the smaller powers of developing countries that acquire atomic weapons. In 1982 a total of 23 countries had 275 operating nuclear reactors, and many more countries are expected to acquire them in the near future.¹⁶

Experts acknowledge the possibility that some of these countries could eventually use their nuclear reactors to produce atomic bombs. India, for example, in 1975 staged a "peaceful" nuclear explosion, soon after Canada sold her a nuclear reactor for peaceful purposes. If a student at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology could devise a nuclear bomb in five weeks using published material available in a good library, it is conceivable that a number of nations could assemble thermonuclear weapons, if called for by their perception of national interests.

A country under stress could conceivably consider deploying nuclear weapons to blackmail richer nations into transferring food and other resources to its starving millions. Senator Mark Hatfield has warned: "The greatest threat to this nation and the stability of the entire world is hunger. It's

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.”¹⁷

Besides hunger, there are political tensions in several areas of the world today which could degenerate into a major international conflict. A small use of nuclear weapons in any of these areas could easily trigger an international military conflict. “Any use of nuclear weapons,” warns an essay written by four winners of the Albert Einstein International Peace Prize, “carries with it a high and inescapable risk of escalation into the general nuclear war which would bring ruin to all and victory to none.”¹⁸

3. Conclusion

The above considerations suggest that the prospects for a future global confrontation appear very real today. The increasing social, economic, and political tensions in many parts of the world, coupled with the unchecked growth of conventional and nuclear weapons, could easily drag mankind into an unwanted worldwide conflict. Such a conflict could well be the apocalyptic battle of Armageddon or, at least, the prelude to it.

This conclusion is shared by numerous statesmen, scientists, and writers, and has been dramatized in recent films. Andrei Sakharov, the father of the Russian hydrogen bomb, warns that “the unchecked growth of thermonuclear arsenals and the buildup toward confrontation threatens mankind with the death of civilization and physical annihilation”¹⁹ Hollywood also has been exploiting this human apprehension with such films as *Apocalypse*, *Earthquake*, *The Day the World Ended*, and *The Day After*.

The message of the secular “prophets” who predict the coming of Armageddon is one of doom and gloom. They see no light at the end of the tunnel. Biblical prophets, on the other hand, see in the final conflict not merely the End but also the Beginning of “a new heaven and a new earth” (Rev 21:1).

The globality and destructiveness of wars mankind has experienced in this century, as well as the present increase in conflicts and armaments, are, for believers, harbingers that the Lord will soon return to bring to an end present conflicts and wickedness and establish a new order where people “shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more” (Is 2:4).

II. Natural Disasters

Together with wars, Jesus mentioned as signs of the End the occurrence of disasters such as earthquakes and famines: “There will be earthquakes in various places, there will be famines” (Mark 13:8; cf. Matt 24:7). The

occurrence of disasters such as earthquakes raises questions regarding their causes and meaning. Are disasters caused by natural or supernatural forces? Do disasters have any meaning or message for mankind?

1. Natural Causes?

In our scientific age we tend to discount supernatural forces, looking instead for “natural” causes of disasters. The very designation “natural disasters” implies that there is no supernatural involvement.

In the past decades, for example, the underlying cause of earthquakes has been explained by a bold new geological theory called “plate tectonics.” As *Time* graphically explains, this new theory “holds that the surface of the earth consists of about a dozen giant, 70-mile-thick rock plates. Floating on the earth’s semimolten mantle and propelled by as yet undetermined forces, the plates are in constant motion. Where they meet, friction sometimes temporarily locks them in place, causing stresses to build up near their edges. Eventually the rock fractures, allowing the plates to resume their motion. It is that sudden release of pent-up energy that causes earthquakes.”²⁰

This impressive theory acknowledges that “undetermined forces” propel the constant motion of the plates constituting the surface of the earth. Christians who believe in a Creator-God who upholds “the universe by his word of power” (Heb 1:3) recognize in these “undetermined forces” the mysterious outworking of divine wisdom and power. In His wisdom God sometimes uses what we call “natural disasters” to call mankind to repentance.

2. A Manifestation of Divine Judgment

The Scripture views earthquakes as a manifestation of divine power (Ex 19:18) and of divine judgment upon human wickedness. Isaiah, for example, warns disobedient Israel that “in an instant, suddenly, you will be visited by the Lord of hosts with thunder and with earthquake and great noise, with whirlwind and tempest, and the flame of a devouring fire” (Is 29:6). In this passage the prophet presents what we call “natural disasters” caused by storm, earthquake, and fire as a divine judgment upon Israel.

It is noteworthy that both the death and the resurrection of Jesus—which in a sense expressed God’s judgment upon sin (Rom 5:8, 16; John 12:31)—were marked by an earthquake (Matt 27:54; 28:2). Similarly in Revelation an earthquake precedes the sounding of the seven trumpets which announce divine judgment upon mankind (Rev 8:5), and “a great earthquake” marks the Coming of Christ in judgment upon the wicked (6:12-17; 16:18-21)..

3. A Call to Repentance

Disasters such as earthquakes, volcanic eruption, tornados, and hurricanes can have a sobering effect upon the human mind. They can challenge complacent, self-centered, and self-sufficient people to acknowledge their finiteness and helplessness and thus to seek God. It was the earthquake which marked the death of Christ that led the centurion and his soldiers to confess, “Truly this was the Son of God” (Matt 27:54).

John Wesley wrote in 1777 to a friend: “There is no divine visitation which is likely to have so general an influence upon sinners as an earthquake.”²¹ It is reported that in a high school in Palm Springs (California) there was a sign in 1975 which read: “In the event of an earthquake, the Supreme Court ruling against prayers in school will be temporarily suspended.”

4. Harbingers of the Final Judgment

Disasters such as earthquakes and famines figure prominently among the Advent signs, because they are signs of divine judgment and of concern for evildoers to repent before the final judgment. They represent a solemn divine warning and appeal to repent and be saved before the final judgment.

Disasters such as earthquakes, as noted earlier, will intensify before Christ’s Coming. Jesus spoke of wars, earthquakes, famines, and pestilences 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).

Against this background we may ask, Are disasters such as earthquakes, famines, and epidemics prominent in our time? If so, what message is God attempting to convey to mankind through them?

5. Natural Disasters Today

It is difficult to establish with accuracy whether or not major disasters caused by earthquakes, floods, tidal waves, tornados, and hurricanes are occurring with greater frequency today than in the past. A major reason is the limited information available about their past occurrence. Some feel that what has increased is not necessarily the number of disasters but rather the public awareness of them because of the greater news-media coverage of such happenings and because more of them have recently occurred in populated areas.

Noticeable Increase. Other disagree, believing instead that in the twentieth century and particularly in recent years there has been a noticeable increase, for example, of “significant earthquakes” which register at least 6.5 on the Richter scale or cause casualties or considerable damage. *Science*

News, for example, reports that according to the U.S. Geological Survey, “twice as many significant earthquakes rocked the United States in 1980 as in 1979, in keeping with *a worldwide trend in increased temblors*.”²² This has caused “a sharp rise in the number of quake-related deaths internationally.”²³ The same periodical notes that, according to the United States Geological Survey, “14 quakes in 1983 were major quakes (magnitude 7.0 to 7.9) compared to 10 for the previous year.”²⁴

Commenting on the Chinese earthquake of July 28, 1976, that is reported to have been the worst killer in human history (about 800,000 deaths), *U.S. News & World Report* writes: “Coming hard after devastating quakes elsewhere, the China disaster raises the question of whether the earth is in a period of severe tremors that may strike other earthquake-prone regions.”²⁵

Major Earthquakes. Australian seismologist G. A. Eiby, in his book *Earthquakes* (1980), provides what is perhaps the most comprehensive listing of the important earthquakes which occurred between 1500 and 1976. The list is divided into two parts. The first covers the period from 1500 to 1902, that is, “the period in which reliable information is available down to the general availability of instrumental records.” For this period of four centuries 131 historical earthquakes are recorded.²⁶

The second list begins in 1903,—”because that is the first year for which reasonably accurate and complete instrumental magnitudes are available,”—and ends with the Chinese earthquake of July 27, 1976. For this period of 73 years 206 earthquakes are recorded with magnitude of 8.0 or more (like 1906, San Francisco). The list includes a selection of smaller-magnitude earthquakes that “have attracted unusual public attention.”²⁷

In view of the lack of instrumental records prior to 1903, it is improper to conclude from Eiby’s listing that the incidence of major earthquakes has increased more than one hundredfold in our century. On the other hand, it seems hard to discount what appears to be a noticeable rate of increase of destructive earthquakes in the twentieth century.

Recent Disasters. A brief mention could be made at this juncture of the major earthquakes, floods, tornados, and hurricanes which have killed several hundred thousand people on every continent during this past decade. For the sake of brevity, we will omit this survey, referring the reader to any *Almanac* where major recent disasters are concisely given. Moreover, the news media are daily bringing us up to date about new disasters occurring in different parts of the world.

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 buildings in Florida. Such cataclysms of earth and weather, coming one on 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.”²⁸

6. Conclusion

The preceding observations indicate that mankind is experiencing today an intensification of destructive disasters. To the Christian this trend indicates not that “mother nature has gone berserk” but rather that divine judgments are being manifested in a special way in our time, to call mankind to repentance before the final judgment at Christ’s Coming.

III. Man-Made Disasters

The Turning Point. We live today at the turning point of human history. Not only “natural disasters” are intensifying but also those which are caused by irresponsible management of the resources God has given to mankind. The Club of Rome, one of the most distinguished watchdog organizations of our present crises, consisting of about 100 scientists and political leaders, entitled its second report, *Mankind at the Turning Point*.

The report opens with this dramatic acknowledgment: “Suddenly—virtually overnight when measured on a historical scale—mankind finds itself confronted by a multitude of unprecedented crises: The population crisis, the environmental crisis, the world food crisis, the energy crisis, the raw material crisis, to name just a few. New crises appear while old ones linger on.”²⁹ The significance of “the rapid succession of crises which are currently engulfing the entire globe,” according to the same report, is that “humanity is at a turning point in its historical evolution.”³⁰

The current threat to human survival has arisen because mankind’s increasing power over the environment has not been matched by increasing wisdom and restraint. Human beings have been unfaithful stewards of God’s creation. Their concern to satisfy present needs has taken precedence over possible future consequences. The result is that the think layer of air, soil, and water (known as the biosphere) upon which human life depends has been polluted. Indispensable resources are being fast depleted. In the context of this study only a brief allusion can be made to the pollution of our environment and to the depletion of our natural resources.

1. Pollution of the Environment

The problem of air, water, and soil pollution has assumed frightening global proportions in our time. In the past when populations were smaller, nature was capable of assimilating and processing human waste products. Today, however, increasing urbanization and industrialization are generating so many millions of tons of waste that nature can no longer assimilate and process it.

Waste experts estimate that “the world is now generating between 500 million and a billion tons of solid waste each year, and those figures could double every 15 years.” The sad reality is that, as stated by waste expert Arthur Purcell, “For the most part, we are just sweeping it under the rug.”³¹

Toxic Waste. This unprecedented accumulation and disposal of waste—some of which consists of toxic, hazardous substances—in the air, water, and soil is causing nightmares in many parts of the world. In the United States whole communities such as the one by Love Canal near Niagara Falls and Times Beach in Missouri, have been evacuated because toxic waste found in the soil and water made them unsafe for human habitation.

In other cities such as New York and Los Angeles, air pollutants reach such unhealthful levels that children, the elderly, and persons with respiratory problems are warned to stay indoors over 100 days each year. To make the air and the water cleaner, the United States is expected to spend 690 billion dollars during the 1980s.³²

The pollution problem is by no means confined to the United States. In India, the Ganges River, which is polluted by the untreated sewage and waste of towns, cities, and industries, has become a health hazard to over 200 million people who live along its 1500 mile course. “In Greater Manila,” writes *U.S. News & World Report*, “some 6 million people do not have what scientists consider potable water.”³³ The article reports on the problem of pollution in the Soviet Union, China, the Far East, the Middle East, Europe, and South America, and concludes that “U.S. is not alone—pollution is global.”³⁴

Acid Rain. Perhaps the most widespread pollution problem of the 1980s is the so-called “acid rain.” In many parts of the earth the rain mixes in the air with pollution from burning fuels of factories, power stations, and motor vehicles and then brings down diluted sulphuric and nitric acids. According to a recent United Nations study, between 5 and 10 million square kilometers of Europe and North America are affected by acid rain.³⁵

The acid fallout is caused not only by the pollutants produced by each country but also by those pollutants transported by the wind from neighboring

countries. For example, Canadians complain that half of their acid fall-out is caused by emissions from the United States. Similarly, Scandinavians attribute 75 percent of their problem to the emissions from Britain and Europe.

The damage done to human health and environment by acid fallout and airborne pollutants is incalculable. It is estimated that 20,000 lakes in Sweden are polluted by acid rain and 6,000 of them are dead, with no living fish. Acid rain accelerates the corrosion of most materials, including metals. Some of the world's greatest monuments, such as the Parthenon in Athens, the Cathedral in Milan (Duomo), and Trajan's Column in Rome, are being eaten away by acid rain. "Statistical studies do show that people living in urban polluted air experience more disease than people living in less polluted, usually rural air."³⁶

No one is quite sure how much more pollution the earth's atmosphere, water, and soil can take before human and animal life becomes irreversibly threatened. What is certain is that if present trends persist, the disruption of the life-support systems on this planet will soon become inevitable and irreversible.

Greenhouse Effect. Another alarming pollution problem in the so-called "greenhouse effect." The burning of fossil fuels (coal, oil, and natural gas) and the elimination of trees are constantly increasing the level of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. This invisible gas is vital to green plants, but when it increases beyond the capacity of plants or of the oceans to absorb it, this gas then becomes like a thermal blanket.

Like the glass of a greenhouse, it allows the sun's rays to pass through it, but it prevents the heat given off by the earth from radiating back into space. The result is that as the level of carbon dioxide increases, the atmosphere becomes warmer. This warming in turn increases the water vapor in the air, adding another "greenhouse" gas that traps the heat.

New studies released in October 1983 by the Environmental Protection Agency and the National Academy of Sciences predict that if the present warming trend continues, "climatic changes could be felt as early as the 1990s." The temperature is expected to increase by 4 degrees Fahrenheit by the year 2040. The rising temperature will melt snow and ice, causing the polar icecaps to shrink. The sea levels could rise by 2 feet by 2025, thereby inundating low-lying coastal areas and drastically affecting rainfall patterns.³⁷

Though there are still unanswered questions, there is little doubt among scientists that if the present buildup of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere continues, life on this planet will be seriously threatened. NASA's Brian

Toon, who has been studying the greenhouse effect on cloud-covered Venus (900 degrees F. surface temperature), concludes: "We are on the ragged edge of convincingly demonstrating that it is happening on earth as well."³⁸

2. Depletion of Natural Resources

The threat to human survival is posed, not only by the pollution of our environment, but also by the depletion of our natural resources. In his book *The Limits of Growth*, Professor Dennis Meadows warns that the present rape of the earth's resources is going to be mankind's ultimate undoing, if other destructive disasters do not intervene. Meadows points out that over the next fifteen years mankind must mobilize as much raw materials as have been extracted during the whole course of human history.³⁹ To meet the needs of projected population increases, observes Professor Dale E. Bauman of Cornell University, "we will have to produce as much food in the next 40 years as we have produced in all history."⁴⁰

Desertification. While mankind's demand for food, energy, and minerals is rising steeply, the available resources are dwindling. Arable land, for example, is diminishing in many parts of the world as a result of soil erosion, deforestation, and the spread of deserts. A United Nations study estimates that "the world's deserts will expand by 20% by the year 2000. Per year, 6 million hectares are lost, 20 million hectares are degraded, including 2.6 million hectares of farmland."⁴¹

"In Africa, for example, more than half of the area is affected or is threatened by desertification . . . In Latin America there are currently 25 million persons inhabiting regions suffering from severe desertification, covering an area of 17.5 million square kilometers."⁴²

The same study notes that countries such as China, India, Iran, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, and Pakistan are facing the "increasing encroachment of deserts and deteriorating range lands."⁴³ This process of desertification is attributed to some countries to overgrazing while in others to deforestation and soil erosion. Whatever the causes may be, the fact remains that if the present trend continues, the demand for cultivable land will soon far exceed the supply.

Energy Resources. Among other dwindling resources are oil, gas, and metal reserves. Most experts estimate that the world reserves of carbon-based fuel, based on present consumption, will be almost exhausted within the next 50 to 70 years. A 1975 report of the U.S. Geological Survey, prepared for the Department of the Interior, estimates that world oil and gas reserves, based on recent trends in consumption, "will be dwindling by the end of the century, with almost complete exhaustion by 2030."⁴⁵

Mineral Reserves. The depletion of the mineral reserves is even more alarming. Some experts estimate that of the eighteen crucial mineral commodities—such as coal, iron, copper, and aluminum—at the present rate of consumption only eight of them on a worldwide scale will last beyond the year 2000.⁴⁶

If the rate of consumption continues to increase at the rate it has done since 1960, then the reserves of all the minerals, with the exception of two, will be practically depleted within fifty years.⁴⁷ Admittedly, new reserves might be found and recycling will stretch our reserves. The oceans also might be able to alleviate the impending shortage of some minerals. All these possibilities, however, cannot obscure the fact that our resources are limited and are being depleted at a frighteningly fast rate.

Water. Clean water is another essential resource for human survival which is becoming increasingly scarce because of ignorance, indifference, and irresponsible actions. Surface waters are being contaminated by sewage, industrial wastes, oil spills, the runoff of inorganic fertilizers, pesticides, herbicides, acid rain, and by the hundreds of thousands of commercial and pleasure vessels that daily spill their sewage and garbage into the illusory vastness of the oceans.

“Our technological society,” writes W. Dayton Robert in his book *Running Out*, “has thus far successfully polluted more than half of the earth’s lakes and rivers to a degree that seriously threatens our way of life and affords little hope of supporting the population growth of the years ahead.”⁴⁸

The clear, sparkling water which the Savior presents as the symbol of His power to renew and cleanse human lives (John 4:13-14) has in many places become polluted, seriously threatening marine and human life. Clean drinking water in many parts of the world has become such a precious commodity that it is sold in bottles to those who can afford to buy it. Some water-supply experts predict that the water crisis will intensify in the near future, spurring a series of “water wars” in areas where the population will grow despite arid conditions.⁴⁹

3. Conclusion

Natural disasters and man-made environmental crises are increasing significantly. This trend poses fundamental questions: Why are so many disasters and crises occurring in our time? What is the meaning of the many earthquakes, floods, droughts, tornados, and hurricanes which in recent years have killed hundreds of thousands of persons and destroyed much property?

What is the significance of the fact that we are running out of fuel, food, water, air, and minerals (just about everything except people)? What is the meaning of the threat to human survival posed by nuclear weapons, acid rain, and the greenhouse effect?

Impending Divine Judgment. Disasters, as noted earlier, announce the proximity of God's judgment and invite people to repent before it is too late. The present intensification of natural and man-made disasters must be seen as clear signs of impending divine judgment and divine concern for mankind. These disasters tell us that, as in the experience of ancient nations, God will not allow human rebellion and wickedness to continue much longer (Gen 15:16). Soon Christ will come to bring an End to the colossal crises that are engulfing our fragile planet (Rom 8:19-22). The End will signal a new beginning.

IV. Famines

The occurrence of famines is presented by Christ in His Olivet Discourse together with wars and earthquakes as one of the precursory signs of His Advent: "There will be famines" (Matt 24:7; Mark 13:8).

1. The Meaning of Famines

Famines are regarded in the Bible, not as a mere accident but as part of God's ordering of the lives of His people. It was by means of famine that Abraham and Jacob went to Egypt (Gen 12:10), that Naomi met with Ruth (Ruth 1:1), that God raised Joseph to a position of authority in Egypt (Gen 41). The usually states purpose of actual or threatened famine is the judgment of God designed to warn (1 Kings 17:1), to correct (2 Sam 21:1) or to punish His people or heathen nations (Jer 29:17-18; Ezek 5:11-12). Similarly the famines predicted by Christ represent divine judgment upon human rebellion prior to Christ's Coming.

Widespread Famine. The scene of widespread famine before Christ's Coming is portrayed in Revelation symbolically through a pair of scales in the hands of a rider. A voice is heard saying: "A quart of wheat for a day's wages, and three quarts of barley for a day's wages, and do not damage the oil and the wine!" (Rev 6:5-6, NIV).

The scales suggest that careful rationing will be needed in using the little food that can be purchased with the income of a day's work. The worldwide extent of the crisis is intimated also by the mention that "a fourth of the earth" will be destroyed "with sword and with famine and with pestilence and by wild beasts of the earth" (Rev 6:8). It is noteworthy that the same signs (war, famine, and pestilence) are found in the Olivet Discourse (Luke 21:10-11).

2. Past Famines

Famines have been common throughout history. Acts alludes to a particularly severe famine which took place about A.D. 44 (Acts 11:28). India and China have experienced some of the worst famines. It is estimated, for example, that in India 800,000 died as a result of the famine of 1837, a million from that of 1863, and another million in 1900. Similarly, China experienced severe famines in 1877 to 1879 and in 1902. After World War II there occurred perhaps the worst world-side food shortage which the U.S.A. alleviated by sending millions of tons of food to the starving millions of Europe and Asia.

3. Starvation Today

More Hungry People. Since famines—caused by wars, floods, droughts, or harmful insects such as locusts—have often occurred in the past, is it legitimate to look for a unique contemporary fulfillment of this Advent sign? Our answer is “Yes!” for at least two reasons. First, never before has mankind had one billion persons suffering from starvation or malnutrition. As aptly stated by over 2500 distinguished citizens from more than 100 countries, “Despite efforts by governments and the international community to solve world food problems, more people are hungry today than ever before.”⁵⁰

Second, the problem of hunger is increasing in many developing countries where population growth far outstrips the increase in food production. This trend has led agricultural scientists such as Keith Barrons, author of *The Food in Your Future*, to warn: “Don’t be surprised if the greatest famine in history occurs sometime in this decade.”⁵¹

Population Explosion. A major contributory factor to the unprecedented hunger crisis present in the world today is the population explosion which has been occurring during this past century. It took until 1830 for the world to have one billion persons. But then it took only a hundred years (1930) to add another billion. The third billion was added in merely thirty years (1960), the fourth billion in half the previous time, namely, fifteen years (1975). It is estimated that the years required to add a fifth and a sixth billion to the world population will be even less, namely, eleven and nine years respectively. By the year 2000 the world’s population will have climbed to about seven billion.⁵²

The problem is compounded by the fact that by the year 2000, eighty percent of the world population will be living in developing countries where a hunger crisis already prevails.⁵³ The “1983 Food Report,” prepared by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, notes that popula-

tion has grown in developing countries “from 2,092 million in 1960 to 3,301 million twenty years later, or roughly 2.3 percent a year.”⁵⁴

Food Decrease. In many developing countries, however, food production has not kept pace with population growth. On the contrary, the same report indicates that food production per person in 1980, compared to 1970, “declined or stagnated, in 35 out of 41 African countries, 17 out of 34 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, 8 out of 15 in the Near East and 11 out of 29 Asian countries.”⁵⁵ This relative decline in food production has caused many developing countries to become increasingly dependent upon imports from developed countries, primarily North America.

4. The Green Revolution

In the 1960s many experts looked to the so-called “Green Revolution” to solve the world food needs. With the financial support of the Rockefeller Foundation, agrobiologists succeeded in breeding new high-yielding grain seeds which doubled the wheat and rice yields in several countries.

“The remarkable productivity of the Green Revolution,” writes the *Futurist*, “seemed to many people to represent the beginning of the end for the problem of world hunger—because it offered the hope that with modern agricultural techniques the world’s poor would be able to feed themselves and would not be forced to take their limited funds to the global marketplace.”⁵⁶

Unfortunately, the reality of life has shattered such a hope. A combination of factors, including rising energy prices, tightening supplies of fertilizers, poor harvests, the relentless growth of population in developing countries, the massive amounts of water and fertilizers needed to grow the new high-yielding grains, all have combined to obliterate the gains made during the past decade.

Starving Children. A 1983 UNICEF report on the “State of the World’s Children” estimates that every day in 1982 “more than 40,000 young children have died from malnutrition. And for every one who has died, six now live on in hunger and ill-health which will be forever etched upon their lives.”⁵⁷ The same report forecasts that “the absolute number of children living and growing in malnutrition and ill-health is set to increase . . . by approximately 30 percent.”⁵⁸ What this means is that if present trends continue we will see by the year 2000 “a horrifying increase in the number of undernourished [children] to some 600-650 millions.”⁵⁹

In Calcutta there is a hospital that cares for starving children. A head nurse has been quoted as saying: “They die so gracefully.” But they die nevertheless. The starvation of a few individuals is a sad statistic, but the

starvation of hundreds of millions is an unprecedented world tragedy. In the last chapter we will consider the Christian responsibility toward the hungry millions.

One Billion Hungry Persons. The UN Food and Agriculture Organization estimates the number of starving people in the world to be 462 million. This ghastly figure hardly tells the whole story. Experts estimate that there are another half to one billion persons lacking sufficient protein, even though they eat enough calories. A conservative estimate gives a total of half-a-billion starving and half-a-billion malnourished persons suffering today.⁶⁰ What this means is that there are today a grand total of about one billion hungry persons, which translates into one out of every four inhabitants of this planet. The prediction of Christ that “there will be famines” (Matt 24:7) is truly being fulfilled in an unprecedented way in our time.

5. Future Prospects

The prospects for the future are hardly brighter. In a three-year, million-dollar study commissioned by President Carter in 1980 and published under the title “Global 2000 Report to the President,” Gerald O. Barney and associates predict that “the number of people whose food intake will be below the Food and Agriculture Organization minimum requirements levels [a euphemism for starvation] will increase from 500 million now to 1200 million as the world enters the 21st century.”⁶¹ A major reason for the expected sharp rise in the number of starving and malnourished people is that in developing countries where food is already scarce, the population is expected to almost double in the next 20 years.

Urban Explosion. By the year 2000 four-fifths of the world population will be living in less developed countries where food is already hard to obtain. To make matters worse, millions of persons will attempt to escape poverty in the countryside by flocking to the cities. The United Nations estimates that by the year 2000, cities will become monstrous urban conglomerations. Thirty million persons will be living in Mexico City, 26 million in São Paulo, 24 million in Tokyo, 23 million in Shanghai, 17 million in Calcutta, Bombay, and Jakarta.⁶²

Between 1975 and 2000 the urban population of developing countries is expected to increase by almost a billion. This trend will aggravate the existing urban problems of housing, health, education, and hunger. The hideous conditions of the urban slums—called *favelas* in Brazil, *barriadas* in Peru, *tugurios* in Colombia, *ranchos* in Venezuela—where millions live and die packed tightly together without ready access to water or toilets, or proper shelters, will only become more desperate.

Catastrophic Famine. For the coming generation, the symbol of death may well be not war but starvation—which Richard Selzer calls “strangulation in the open air.”⁶³ “Sooner or later before the end of the century,” wrote William G. Pollard in 1970, “catastrophic famine, with its attendant threat of epidemic disease and disruption of established order, is highly probable . . . Much that we hold dear and have long cherished will be destroyed never to be recovered.”⁶⁴

This predicted catastrophic famine has already broken out on the African continent where, according to the United Nation’s Food and Agricultural Organization, 150 million persons in 24 countries are facing starvation.⁶⁵ In his opening address at the Conference on the Emergency Situation in Africa (March 11-15, 1985), Mr. Pérez de Cuéllar, UN Secretary-General, said: “The war we wage on famine in Africa today threatens more lives than ever have been lost in any war in history.”⁶⁶

6. Conclusion

Will God allow the proliferation of famines, wars, disasters, and the depletion/pollution of the earth’s resources to destroy the present order? In His prophetic discourse, Christ spoke of wars, earthquakes, famines, pestilences, not as being the cause of the End but rather as being the precursory signs of the End.

The End of the present order will be brought about not by irresponsible human destruction of God’s good creation, but by the Coming of Christ who will bring an end to human perversity and suffering and will restore peace, justice, and prosperity on this earth. The fact that we are experiencing today an unprecedented intensification of the various predicted disasters—such as famines—which threaten the very survival of mankind is a clear sign to the believer that the Return of Christ is both certain and imminent.

V. Pestilences

Luke’s version of the Olivet Discourse includes “pestilences” among the signs of the End given by Christ: “there will be great earthquakes, and in various places famines and pestilences” (Luke 21:11). “Pestilence” is an infectious or contagious disease that reaches epidemic proportions. The word occurs especially in the writings of the prophets, where it is frequently associated with the terms “sword” and “famine” (Jer 14:12; 21:9; Ezek 6:11; 12:16). Since these three forms of divine judgment are casually interrelated, it is not surprising that they are found together in the prediction of the prophets and of Christ (Luke 21:10-11).

1. The Meaning of Pestilences

Manifestation of Divine Judgment. Pestilence is generally seen in the Bible, like war and famine, as a manifestation of divine judgment upon human rebellion. A pestilence was sent on Israel as a result of David's sin in numbering the people (2 Sam 24:13-15). Jeremiah and Ezekial repeatedly speak of pestilence as a punishment from God for Israel's rebellion (Jer 14:12; 21:5-6; 29:17-18; Ezek 5:7, 12, 17; 6:11-12). The same concept is carried over in the New Testament, where "sword, famine, and pestilence" are mentioned in Revelation as the manifestation of divine judgment upon mankind (Rev 6:8; cf. 16:2).

A Call to Repentance. Sickness, especially when it assumes epidemic proportions, can have a sobering effect upon the mind. It can lead even the wealthy, the knowledgeable, and the powerful to recognize their limitations and mistakes and to seek for divine forgiveness and salvation. It was the sickness of a servant that led a centurion to seek help from Christ (Matt 8:5-13). The same is true today. Many persons are tempted to place their faith primarily on medical resources, but when an incurable disease is contracted, sometimes they will turn to God for help.

Sickness, perhaps more than anything else, can lead a person to give up his sense of independence from God—which is the essence of a sinful life—and to recognize his limitations and dependency upon God for both the present and the future life—which is the essence of the Christian life. Thus pestilences, like famines and disasters, must be seen as signs both of divine judgment upon human rebellion and of divine concern for human repentance and salvation.

2. The Persistence of Pestilences

Past Pestilences. Contagious diseases of epidemic proportions have appeared at various times in human history. It is estimated that 25 million persons died in the fourteenth century as a result of the Black Death. Similarly the Spanish influenza wiped out about 20 million people at the end of World War I.

In view of the past occurrence of epidemic diseases, is the "pestilence" sign given by Christ being fulfilled to any great degree today? Some persons would answer this question negatively, especially in view of the spectacular breakthrough of medical science in finding cures for many former killers. Since the discovery of antibiotics in 1928 and the development of vaccines, former killers such as smallpox, polio, and measles have been to a large extent conquered.

Present Pestilences. Despite these unquestionable medical triumphs, pestilence still does persist and has reached epidemic proportions in many parts of the world. Some of the contributory factors are the pollution of the air, water, and food; the sexual revolution; the unprecedented abuse of drugs such as alcohol, tobacco, marijuana, cocaine, and heroin; the deterioration of sanitary conditions caused by the population explosion and economic depression; hunger in developing countries, and overeating in affluent societies. These and other factors are causing the resurgence of old infectious diseases as well as the emergence of baffling new ones.

3. Epidemic Diseases in Developed Countries

Heart Diseases and Cancer. In industrialized nations the two leading killers are cardiovascular disorders and cancer. In the United States alone over one million Americans die each year of heart and artery diseases and about half a million from cancer.⁶⁷ A United Nations report on “World Society 1982” estimates that “approximately five million people die from cancer every year” and at least twice as many from cardiovascular diseases.⁶⁸

After four decades of medical victories, infectious diseases are also on the rise again. Dr. William S. Jordan, Jr., director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID) says: “Infectious diseases have not been licked. They are still the world’s leading cause of death and, here at home, the leading cause of illness.”⁶⁹

Venereal Diseases. Many countries are currently experiencing an epidemic of venereal diseases as a result of the sexual revolution. In the United States, for example, “herpes viruses, once known primarily as a cause of ordinary cold sores, now are responsible for genital herpes in at least 5 million Americans . . . 500,000 new cases are reported annually—double the number of three years ago . . . Gonorrhea is spreading even faster than herpes, striking an estimated 2 million to 3 million new victims a year.”⁷⁰

The problem of sexually transmitted diseases is much greater than these statistics might suggest. As Dr. Milton Puziss, specialist in bacteriology and virology at NIAID, explains, “What we see in statistics is just the tip of the iceberg, because most doctors are afraid they will be sued for violating patients’ privacy if they report the cases.”⁷¹

AIDS. A most virulent disease which has recently surfaced is AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome), which first appeared among homosexuals. The disease destroys the body’s immune system and thus is regarded as one of the most deadly diseases. The disease is spreading largely among homosexual through sexual contact and among drug users by the use of contaminated needles.

Though the actual number of AIDS victims is relatively small in the U.S.A. (12,067 cases diagnosed as of August 1985), the disease is causing great panic for two major reasons. First, it is deadly; and second, it is doubling every year. Dr. James Curran, Director of AIDS Activity at the Center for Disease Control in Atlanta, reports that “of those diagnosed with AIDS more than two years ago, more than 85 percent have died.”⁷²

These various forms of sexually related “pestilences” remind us of Paul’s indictment of the sexual perversion of his time: “For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions . . . men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in their own persons the due penalty for their error” (Rom 1:26-27).

A major factor contributing to the increase in pestilences is the resistance that bacteria have developed to antibiotics, thus rendering the latter ineffective. Dr. James C. Hill of NIAID explains: “We are getting to the point where virtually every organism shows some kind of resistance. We have to be ready for the day when none of our drugs will work on some of the germs.”⁷³ Drug resistance is in fact blamed for “a 30 percent rise in leprosy and a 19 percent increase in malaria victims since the late 1970s.”⁷⁴

4. Pestilences in Developing Countries

The prevalence of contagious diseases in developing countries is far greater than in industrialized nations. This sad fact is largely ignored in our affluent societies, which are concerned mostly with fighting cancer and cardiovascular diseases. This is indicated, for example, by the gross disproportion between the investment in cancer research and the investment in research on tropical diseases. While \$815 million are spent annually on cancer research, according to the World Health Organization, only about \$30 million are accorded for research on tropical diseases.⁷⁵

Tropical Diseases. Most North Americans ignore the frightening prevalence and devastation caused by such tropical diseases as “ascariasis,” an intestinal roundworm infection which, according to the United Nations, victimizes 650 million people; or “ancylostomiasis,” a disease caused by hookworms which feed in the small intestine and which afflicts 450 million people; or “amoebiasis,” a dysentery caused by amoeba which victimizes 350 million persons and kills at least six million children annually; or “filiaris,” a roundworm infection affecting 300 million persons and causing blindness and elephantiasis; or “schistosomiasis,” a miserable and generally incurable disease caused by minute parasitic worms in the blood stream which victimizes 300 million people.⁷⁶

Six Killers. In addition to these “obscure” intestinal parasitic diseases, which in some developing countries have a devastating effect on the living and working conditions of 80 to 90 percent of the population, there are the better known diseases such as measles, tuberculosis, whooping cough, polio, tetanus, and diphtheria. According to the United Nations, “5 million children a year die from these six killers and 5 million more are disabled.”⁷⁷

Malaria also has increased noticeably in recent years and has become “a severe health problem in about 70 countries and appears to be the cause of at least one million deaths among children.”⁷⁸ The overall conclusion reached by the World Health Organization is that over the last decade there has been “a startling increase” in the incidence and prevalence of the various diseases mentioned above.⁷⁹

This brief report on epidemic diseases suffices to make us aware that Christ’s prediction of pestilences in various places is being fulfilled in an extraordinary way in our time. Pestilences persist today in developed and in developing countries, and victimize millions of persons. Besides the many millions that die annually because of sickness, there are countless millions who live miserable lives, in discomfort and agony. Their bodies are debilitated by cancer, drug abuse, intestinal parasites, or various other kinds of diseases.

The prospect for the future is hardly brighter. The anticipated growth in population, especially in developing countries, will intensify the already acute problems of starvation, of pollution and depletion of basic resources, of lack of adequate housing and sanitation, thus making the present prevalence of disease even worse. The more I reflect upon the precarious state of human life and environment, the more I welcome the prospect of Christ’s soon Return to redeem human and subhuman creation from the tragic consequences of human rebellion.

CONCLUSION

The four signs of divine judgment—wars, disasters, famines, and pestilences—are being fulfilled in a special way in our time. Mankind has experienced in this century the globality and destructiveness of wars in an unprecedented way. Two world wars have caused more casualties and sufferings than all the previous wars combined. The ongoing race in conventional and nuclear armaments could easily drag mankind into another worldwide conflict which could well be the apocalyptic battle of Armageddon, or at least the prelude to it.

Both natural and man-made disasters are increasing in different parts of the world. Through natural cataclysms and man-made environmental crises,

God is announcing His impending judgment upon human rebellion and is calling people to repent before it is too late.

Famine also prevails in many parts of the world. About one billion persons today are suffering because of either starvation or malnutrition. Their number is expected to rise sharply, as the population in developing countries, where food is already scarce, is expected to double in the next 20 years.

In spite of the triumphs of modern medical science, mankind is experiencing a startling increase in the incidence and prevalence of various diseases. The unprecedented fulfillment in our time of all these signs of divine judgment predicted by Christ is a clear harbinger of the impending final judgment that Christ will soon execute upon mankind at His Second Coming. Through these signs God is calling upon unbelievers to repent and upon believers to live holy and godly lives while “waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God” (2 Pet 3:11-12).

NOTES TO CHAPTER 10

1. Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons* (Washington, D.C., 1941), p. 213.

2. Ellen G. White, *Evangelism* (Washington, D.C. 1970), p. 219.

3. All the emphases in the paragraph are supplied.

4. For a discussion of the Jewish use of the expression see Joseph Klausner, *The Messianic Idea in Israel* (New York, 1955), pp. 440-450.

5. George Eldon Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John* (Grand Rapids, 1979), p. 98.

6. Henry B. Swete, *The Apocalypse of St. John* (London, 1951), p. 208. Emphasis supplied.

7. Peter Young, “World War I,” *The World Book Encyclopedia* (Chicago, 1975), vol. 21, p. 376.

8. *Ibid.* See also J. David Singer and Melvin Small, *The Wages of War. 1816-1965: A Statistical Handbook* (New York, 1972), p. 66.

9. Theodore Ropp, “World War II,” *World Book Encyclopedia* (Chicago, 1975), p. 380.

10. Ernest W. Lefever and E. Stephen Hunt, *The Apocalyptic Premise* (Washington, D.C., 1982), pp. X and 391.

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11. "Even in 'Peacetime' 40 Wars are Going On," *U.S. News and World Report* (July 11, 1983), p. 44.
 12. Jonathan Schell, *The Fate of the Earth* (New York, 1982).
 13. For a discussion of these various proposals see *The Apocalyptic Premise* (n. 10).
 14. "Nuclear Weapons," *UN Chronicle* (June, 1982), pp. 57, 62.
 15. "World Society 1982," *UN Chronicle* (November, 1982), p. 45.
 16. The figures are supplied by the *International Atomic Energy Agency* as cited in *Reader's Digest 1983 Almanac and Yearbook*, p. 261. For an informative discussion see "Who Has the Bomb?" *Newsweek* (December 5, 1983), pp. 56-62.
 17. Mark Hatfield, "World Hunger," *World Vision* (February, 1975), p. 5.
 18. McGeorge Bundy, George F. Kennan, Robert S. McNamara, and Gerard K. Smith, "Nuclear Weapons and the Atlantic Alliance," in *Apocalyptic Premise* (n. 10), p. 9.
 19. Cited by John Wesley White, *WW III: Signs of the Impending Battle of Armageddon* (Grand Rapids, 1977), p. 15.
 20. "Forecast: Earthquake," *Time* (September 1, 1975), p. 37.
 21. Cited in "Forecast: Earthquake" (n. 20), p. 37.
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Chapter 11

MISTAKEN SIGNS OF THE ADVENT HOPE

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, for example, a snowstorm, a tornado, an eclipse, a lunar landing, an economic upturn or downturn, a stock market advance or decline, the end of a hostage crisis, or a war, etc. Advance knowledge of when to expect a major development can sometimes make the difference between success or failure, gain or loss, and, in some cases, life or death.

It is not surprising that the desire to spy out the future should lead some persons to study Bible prophecies, not to experience the moral urgency, the certainty and the imminence of the Advent Hope but rather to satisfy their curiosity to know the exact timetable of the final events leading to the Second Advent.

Apocalyptic Literature. During the last few months I have visited scores of Christian Book Stores, where many of the books on display dealing with the “End” are written by authors who use Bible prophecies as a supermarket filled with goods that can satisfy the appetite of everybody. Some of these books, such as *The 1980s: Countdown to Armageddon* by Hal Lindsey, have been on the *New York Times* best-seller list for over 20 weeks. Lindsey’s previous book *The Late Great Planet Earth* has sold over thirty million copies in 31 languages.¹

The incredible popularity of this sensational “apocalyptic” literature is partly due to today’s prevailing uncertainty. Such factors as international tensions, social disorder, natural and man-made disasters, the nuclear threat, and the crime epidemic drive people to look for something to hand on to. When people sense that their very existence is threatened, they are apt to listen to those who claim to know what is coming and how to prepare for it. While

some seek light on the future by turning to horoscopes, to Jeanne Dixon or to authors like George Orwell, others rely on “Christian” apocalyptic literature to descry the immediate future.

Scholarly Indifference. Scholarly publications generally ignore much of this contemporary “Christian” apocalyptic literature which arbitrarily applies Biblical prophecies to contemporary developments. Initially I also was inclined to ignore what I view to be a capricious and irresponsible interpretation of Bible prophecies. To do so, however, would only have served the cause of the enemy of truth by failing to help the many sincere Christians who have been misled by this kind of sensational literature. Therefore, I decided to devote at least one chapter to a brief analysis of some significant mistaken signs of the Advent Hope.

Objectives of Chapter. The objectives of this chapter are basically three, each treated in a separate section. The first aims at presenting a brief summary of the scenario of the last-days events as commonly given by dispensationalist authors. The second analyzes the method of prophetic interpretation used by these authors. The last examines three specific mistaken signs of the Advent Hope.

PART ONE

A POPULAR SCENARIO OF END-TIME EVENTS

1. The Rebirth of Israel

The school of prophetic interpretation known as dispensationalism has successfully popularized a most sensational and detailed scenario of the major final events leading to Armageddon and the Second Advent. The origin, extent, and beliefs of dispensationalism will be discussed immediately below. The name itself, “dispensationalism,” derives from the belief that redemptive history is divided into *distinct dispensations* or segments of time, in each of which God has been working with humanity in a different way.

For dispensationalists the center of the entire End-time prophetic scenario is the State of Israel. The date of May 14, 1948, when David Ben-Gurion read the Declaration of Independence announcing the official establishment of the State of Israel is generally regarded as marking the beginning of the prophetic countdown to Armageddon.

The Last Generation. Some speak of the rebirth of Israel as the “prophetic timepiece” which inaugurates the last or “terminal” generation within which all the End-time prophecies are to be fulfilled. Jesus’ statement,

“Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away till all these things take place” (Matt 24:34), is interpreted as meaning “the generation that would see the signs—chief among them the rebirth of Israel.”²

The conclusion drawn from this interpretation is, in the words of Hal Lindsey, that since “a generation in the Bible is something like forty years . . . then within forty years or so of 1948, all these things could take place.”³ What this means is that within the decade of the eighties all the End-time prophecies are supposed to be fulfilled. Lindsey expresses this conviction in the very title of his book, *The 1980s: Countdown to Armageddon* (1981).⁴ Time is obviously running out on such presumptuous predictions.

2. Rapture, Tribulation, Return, Millennium

The Rapture. The birth of the modern State of Israel has supposedly set the stage for the fulfillment of four major final events: the rapture, the tribulation, the Return of Christ, and the millennium. The rapture is Christ’s secret and invisible coming partway to the earth, to resurrect the sleeping saints and to transform all living believers, both Jews and Gentiles. Risen and transformed believers will be secretly raptured or snatched away from the earth to meet the descending Lord in the air and then go with Him up to heaven to celebrate for seven years the marriage feast of the Lamb.

The Tribulation. The secret rapture marks the beginning of the second major event, the so-called *tribulation* which is to last seven years. Dispensationalists derive this 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. The major events which are supposed to occur during the seven-year tribulation are listed below.

The Return. At the end of the seven-year tribulation the third major event will occur, namely, Christ’s Return in glory with the Church. At this time Christ is supposed to come all the way down to the earth to destroy the wicked, to end the Battle of Armageddon, to judge living Gentiles and Jews, and to establish His millennial reign on this earth.

The Millennium. The millennial Kingdom—which is the last major event—is primarily Jewish, although Gentiles will also share in its blessings. Christ will reign from David’s throne in Jerusalem over those Jews and Gentiles who survived the judgment. These people are not resurrected believers but rather believers who will be alive when Christ returns at the end of the tribulation. During the millennium the Old Testament promises made to national Israel will be fulfilled as prosperity, productivity, and peace will prevail on this earth.

These people will live on this earth during the millennium in the *unresurrected* bodies, while the resurrected saints will be living in the new, heavenly Jerusalem located in the air above the earth. This situation will continue until the end of the millennium, when God will resurrect and judge the unbelievers, destroy His enemies, and create a new heaven and a new earth. The heavenly Jerusalem will then descend to this earth where God and His people will dwell together. Redeemed Jews, however, will throughout eternity remain distinct from redeemed Gentiles.

3. Events During the Tribulation

Dispensationalists attribute enormous importance to the seven-year tribulation. They believe that most of the events of End-time prophecies will be fulfilled during this period. Perhaps the most explicit listing of these events is found in the writings of Hal Lindsey, who is regarded as the best popularizer of the dispensationalist prophetic school of interpretation. Lindsey's sequence of the tribulation events, as far as I have been able to reconstruct it from his writings, appears to be as follows:

Rise of Roman Antichrist. A Roman Dictator (Roman Antichrist) will rise to power immediately after the secret Rapture, out of a revived Roman empire which will consist of the ten-nation confederacy of the European Common Market. This Roman Antichrist will sign a treaty of mutual protection with a Jewish false prophet (Jewish Antichrist) who will rise up in the State of Israel. The Israelis will then rebuild the Jerusalem Temple and will reinstitute its sacrificial services.⁵

After three and a half years of remarkable progress, the Roman Antichrist will be worshiped by many nations because of his brilliant achievements in his cause for world peace and prosperity. "Riding upon the crest of public worship the Roman Dictator will go to Jerusalem and in the Temple proclaim himself to be God incarnate."⁶ By this act he will accomplish the abomination of desolation predicted by Daniel (Dan 9:27; cf. Matt 24:15-16).⁷ The period of the cruel reign of the Antichrist then begins.

Invasion of Israel. The rise to power of the Roman Antichrist will cause the formation of an Arab-African confederacy headed by Egypt, which will launch an invasion of Israel.⁸ This will prove to be a fatal mistake that will spell their doom and set in motion the events leading to the battle of Armageddon. Russia and her allies will counterattack by sweeping over Arab countries as well as the State of Israel.⁹

Conversion of the Jews. At the time of the invasion of Israel by Arabs and by Russians, the greatest Jewish conversion to their true Messiah will

begin. One hundred forty-four thousand physical, literal Jews will become “Jewish Billy Grahams turned loose on this earth—the earth will never know a period of evangelism like this period.”¹⁰ Through their witness an innumerable number of Gentiles will be converted.

Destruction of Russian Army. A vast army consisting of soldiers from the Roman Confederacy (Common Market countries) and from Oriental powers (Red China) will mobilize under the leadership of the Roman Dictator against the Russian army located in Israel. The result of this war will be the complete destruction of the Russian army (Ezek 39:3-5; 38:18-22).¹¹

Battle of Armageddon. With the destruction of both the Arab-African armies and the Russian forces, the two great remaining powers will be the forces of the Roman confederacy led by the Roman Dictator and the Oriental forces united under the Red Chinese war machine.¹² The latter will attack the Roman Dictator and his allies in the place called “Armageddon,” which is in the plain of Jezreel, located in lower Galilee between the Mediterranean and the Jordan river. At the climactic moment of the Battle of Armageddon, Christ will return with the Church to bring the battle to an end and destroy all the ungodly nations.

Millennial Jewish Kingdom. After the Battle of Armageddon, Christ will set up God’s Kingdom on earth (mostly Jewish). This Kingdom will last 1000 years. During the millennium Christ will rule mortals from Jerusalem, where He will sit on David’s throne. This kingdom, which begins with mortal subjects, at the end of the 1000 years takes on the form of an eternal kingdom. A distinction, however, will remain throughout eternity between redeemed Jews and Gentiles.¹³

4. The Extent and Origin of Dispensationalism

The Extent of Dispensationalism. The above scenario of End-time events is widely accepted, with some variations of course, among many Evangelical Christians, who are generally known as “dispensationalists.” This name, as noted earlier, derives from the belief that redemptive history is divided into different dispensations, each of which is viewed as separated from the other and chronologically successive.

Today the stronghold of dispensationalist thinking is the Dallas Theological Seminary. Its president, John F. Walvoord, has developed dispensational theology in half-a-dozen books.¹⁴ The most systematic and apologetic treatment of dispensationalism is the *Systematic Theology* in 8 volumes by Lewis Sperry Chafer.

Dispensationalism is taught in principle at the Chicago Moody Bible Institute and at an estimated two hundred Bible institutes in the United States. Its official magazine is *Bibliotheca Sacra* which was inherited by Dallas Theological Seminary in 1934. Other magazines such as *Christianity Today* supports some of the dispensational views of the End. Popular authors such as Hal Lindsey, J. Dwight Pentecost, Salem Kirban, Dwight Wilson, John F. Walvoord, and Thomas S. McCall, through their writings and motion pictures, have influenced millions of persons to accept all, or at least part, of the above-mentioned End-time scenario.

Worldwide Influence. Though modern dispensationalism is especially popular in North America, its influence is also being felt in other countries. Cornelius Vanderwaal, a Dutch scholar, notes, for example, that “when Hal Lindsey appeared in the Netherlands, it became clear that even sober Calvinists welcomed his dispensationalism with open arms. His predictions about the future were accepted and believed.”¹⁵ Alarmed by such an influence, Vanderwaal felt compelled to write a book in which he critically analyzes dispensational interpretations of prophecies.

Hal Lindsey himself expresses his pleasant surprise at the unexpected, overwhelming, worldwide response to his predictions. After the publication of *The Late Great Planet Earth*, Lindsey writes, “I began receiving letters and even phone calls literally from around the world.”¹⁶ As a result his book has been translated into 31 foreign editions which have been circulated in over 50 countries. Dispensationalism, then, is no longer merely an American phenomenon but one which has assumed global proportions.

The Origin of Modern Dispensationalism. The modern dispensational system of prophetic interpretation is generally traced back to the teaching of John Nelson Darby (1800-1882), an Anglican preacher who broke away from his church and become the leader of a Christian group called the “Plymouth Brethren” or “Darbyists.”¹⁷

Darby rejected the idea of the *unity* of the covenants, teaching instead that redemptive history is divided into seven distinct dispensations: Innocence, Conscience, Human Government, Promise, Law, the Church, and the Kingdom. In each dispensation God makes different demands on man. In the Mosaic (Law) dispensation, He demands obedience to the law of Moses. In the present Christian (Church) dispensation, God demands the acceptance of salvation through faith.¹⁸

Applied to the future, this dispensational system assumes that the Christian Church is not the continuation of God’s Old Testament people, but

an “interruption” or an “intercalation” that began at Pentecost and will terminate when Christ comes to take believers out of this world to heaven through a sudden, secret, and invisible Rapture.

The secret rapture will mark the end of the dispensation of the Church and the beginning of the restoration of the Old Testament dispensation of Israel. This restoration will involve, among other things, the return of the Jews to their homeland, the rebuilding of the Temple, the reinstatement of sacrificial services and the establishment of a millennial kingdom upon this earth which will be primarily Jewish.

Role of Scofield Reference Bible. This prophetic view has been implanted into the thinking of millions of Christians especially through the footnotes of the *Scofield Reference Bible* (1917), which many have come to accept as an orthodox reference work. A revised edition was published in 1967.

As the dispensationalist system developed, a greater role has been attributed to the expected restoration of Israel. The founding of the State of Israel in 1948 and the subsequent events that have transpired in the Middle East have encouraged some modern dispensationalists to develop a more detailed scenario.¹⁹

The emphasis now falls more on the seven-year period following the rapture of the Church. The sequence of events expected to occur at that time has been outlined above. Not all dispensationalists agree on the interpretation of some details, but all basically agree on the major events of the tribulation.

A comprehensive analysis of all the End-time events included in the dispensational prophetic scenario is beyond the limited scope of this study. Accordingly, only a sampling of three specific “prophetic” events will be examined in the third part of this chapter. Before proceeding with such an analysis, however, it is necessary to consider the method of prophetic interpretation used by dispensationalists to construct their scenario of End-time events.

PART TWO

MISTAKEN PRINCIPLES OF PROPHETIC INTERPRETATION

1. The Literal Interpretation of Prophecy

The End-time scenario described above has been developed by applying consistently two principles of prophetic interpretation, known as (1) “Consistent literalism” and (2) Distinction between Israel and the Church. It is necessary briefly to examine these two principles since they determine the whole dispensational prophetic construct.

Definition of “Consistent Literalism.” The principle of “consistent literalism,” as Herman Hoyt, a contemporary dispensationalist explains, “clearly stated is that of taking the Scriptures in their literal and normal sense, understanding that this applies to the entire Bible.”²⁰ Another modern spokesman, Charles C. Ryrie, explicitly states, “Dispensationalism is a result of consistent application of the basic hermeneutical principle of literal, normal, or plain interpretation. No other system of theology can claim this.”²¹

Dispensationalists claim the distinction of interpreting prophecies according to “the natural, literal, and grammatical way which the predictions imply.”²² Before evaluating the validity of this claim, it is important to understand its implications.

Implications of “Consistent Literalism.” The principle of “consistent literalism” has far-reaching implications, especially in the interpretation of Old Testament prophecies. It demands, for example, that the 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 End-time tribulation and especially during the so-called Jewish millennium of Revelation 20.²³ J. Dwight Pentecost, a leading dispensationalist, states, “According to the established principles of interpretation the Davidic covenant demands a literal fulfillment. This means that Christ must reign on David’s throne on earth over David’s people forever.”²⁴

Evaluation of “Consistent Literalism”

Progressive Revelation. Is the principle of “consistent literalism” the legitimate method of interpreting Biblical prophecies? Can the Old Testament prophecies be interpreted as a closed unit, independently from the New Testament witness to their fulfillment? To do so would mean, first of all, to ignore the progressive nature of God’s revelation. The Old Testament represents not God’s complete and final revelation but the prelude to His greater revelation given through Jesus Christ and attested in the New Testament.²⁵

A Jewish expositor who rejects Jesus Christ as the fulfillment of the Old Testament messianic expectations is expected to interpret the Old Testament as a *closed canon*, that is to say, as God’s final and ultimate revelation. The Christian expositor, however, who accepts Christ as the basic fulfillment of many Old Testament prophecies interprets these in the light of the witness of the New Testament. To do otherwise would mean to reject the theological and spiritual organic unity that exists between the two Testaments.

Messianic Fulfillment. Dispensationalists read the Old Testament as if Christ had never come and as if the New Testament had never been written. The promises concerning the people of Israel, the land of Palestine, the Davidic reign, the temple, and the animal sacrifices are taken to be literal and self-contained prophecies, applicable only to the Jews and not as an integral part of God's progressive revelation of His plan of salvation for mankind.

Dispensationalists maintain, for example, that God's original promise to Abraham that his seed would inherit "all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession" (Gen 17:8; cf. 12:7; 13:15; 15:18) is an unconditional, literal promise, whose fulfillment has begun for the first time in 1948 with the dramatic recovery of part of Palestine by the Jews.²⁶

This literalistic interpretation, as will be shown later, ignores the witness of both the Old and the New Testaments. The former explains that the promise of the land was conditional to obedience (Gen 17:8, 9; 18:18; Lev 26: 40-42; Deut 4:25-31) and was historically fulfilled several times (Josh 21:43-45; 24:8-13; 1 Kings 8:56; Jer 32:21-23). The latter interprets God's promise of land and blessings to Abraham's posterity as fulfilled, not through a restoration of national Israel in a future millennium, but through the Coming of Christ Who is the content and the intent of God's covenant with Abraham (Acts 3:25-26; Rom 4:13).²⁷

Expanding Fulfillment. The principle of "consistent literalism" ignores not only the messianic-Christological fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies, but also their expanding fulfillment. By interpreting prophetic portrayals of future events with literal exactness as if they were history written ahead of time, dispensationalists allow no room for greater and/or unexpected fulfillments.

In Chapter 2 we noted that in the Old Testament the Messiah was predicted, for example, as a prophet like Moses, a king like David, a suffering Servant, a heavenly Son of Man. The Jewish leaders in Jesus' time interpreted some of these messianic prophecies with extreme literalism. Their "consistent literalism" resulted in their tragic rejection of the Messiah, because He did not fit their literalistic interpretation which they developed by taking the words of Moses and the prophets with extreme literalism.

This example illustrates how dangerous and inadequate it is to interpret prophecies with absolute literalness. Prophets are not primarily soothsayers who predict the exact unfolding of future events. R. J. Zwi Werblowsky, professor at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, aptly stated at the 1971 Jerusalem Conference on Biblical Prophecy: "Most of us [Jews] would say that the prophets are 'telling forth' rather than foretelling. In fact, to many of

us the very idea that prophecy is prediction would appear a diminution of the actual spiritual stature and spiritual significance of the prophetic message.”²⁸

Unexpected Fulfillment. Dispensational literalism fails to realize that God, being the Lord of history and prophecy, has the right to expand, transform, and interpret what the future fulfillment of prophecy will be in human history. Christ, for example, fulfilled the predicted kingly, prophetic, and priestly roles of the Messiah in unexpected ways. In His humble incarnation, Christ was greater than any king, prophet, or priest who ever rose in Israel (Matt 12:6, 40, 42; Mark 2:24-28; John 6:33-35; 4:12-15; Heb 7:15-18). Thus He fulfilled the various messianic roles but not according to their literal interpretation.

Similarly, the territorial covenant promises made to Abraham are fulfilled in the New Testament, not through a repossession of Palestine by Jews, but rather through the inheritance of the *whole renewed earth* by believers from all nations (Rom 4:13; Matt 5:5, 3; Rev 21: 1-8). The land of Canaan becomes the world, the offspring of Abraham becomes all the believers who live by faith like Abraham (Gal 3:17, 28-29).

The New Testament presents Abraham and his believing descendants as looking forward not merely to return to Palestine but to reach “a better country” of which Palestine was merely a down payment or pledge. Hebrews explains that “if they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city” (Heb 11:15-16). This expanded fulfillment, however, is not according to the dispensational principle of “consistent literalism” but rather according to the divine provision for better and greater things to come which “no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived” (1 Cor 2:9).

Inconsistent Literalism. The principle of “consistent literalism” is contradicted also by its inconsistent application. For example, the *New Scofield Reference Bible* recognizes that numerous Old Testament events and personages such as the stories of Joseph, Rebekah, Ruth, and Rahab, and the crossing of the Jordan River can be interpreted typologically and allegorically as referring to Christ or to the Church.²⁹

Dispensationalists try to explain this inconsistency by differentiating between the *historical* and the *prophetic* parts of the Scriptures. While historical Scriptures can be interpreted allegorically and typologically, prophetic Scriptures must be interpreted, in the words of C. I. Scofield, with “absolute literalness.”³⁰ This arbitrary compartmentalizing of the Scriptures

finds no support in the New Testament, where “in *all* the Scriptures” are found typological allusions to Christ (Luke 24:27; cf. 24:44).³¹

Furthermore, it is evident that some dispensationalists do not even apply consistently the principle of “absolute literalness” to the prophetic Scriptures. For example, the *New Scofield Bible* interprets symbolically Ezekiel’s prophecy (45:13-25) regarding the restoration of animal sacrifices: “The reference to sacrifices is not to be taken literally, in view of the putting away of such offering, but is rather to be regarded as a presentation of the worship of redeemed Israel, in her own land and in the millennial temple, using the terms with which the Jews were familiar in Ezekiel’s day.”

These words have serious implications. If the reinstatement of animal sacrifices is not to be taken literally, why should the restoration of the temple be taken literally? This type of inconsistent literalism challenges the validity of the whole dispensational principle of consistent literalism.”

An Inconsistent Explanation. To avoid this charge of inconsistency, some dispensationalists teach that there will be a literal reinstatement of animal sacrifices in the millennial temple. Such sacrifices, however, as John F. Walvoord explains, are not expiatory, but merely memorials of the one complete sacrifice of Christ.”³²

The attempt to defend the principle of literal consistency by interpreting the sacrifices as merely commemorative and eucharistic not only negates the New Testament teaching on the abolition of temple sacrifices by Christ’s self-sacrifice (Heb 10:9; 7:18; 8:13), but also violates the very principle of “consistent literalism” which dispensationalists wish to uphold. The purpose of sacrifices is explicitly and repeatedly stated in Ezekiel as being “to make atonement” (Ezek 45:15, 17, 20). Since this phrase is consistently used in the Old Testament to indicate the propitiatory or expiatory function of sacrifices, consistency demands that Ezekiel’s sacrifices must also be understood as expiatory and not memorial offerings.

In summary, the principle of “consistent literalism” advocated by dispensationalists 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.

2. Distinction Between Israel and the Church

Two Distinct Peoples. “Consistent literalism” has led dispensationalists to uphold a second determinative principle, namely, the existence of a fundamental and permanent distinction between Israel and the church. “Throughout the ages,” writes Lewis Sperry Chafer, a leading dispensational

theologian, “God is pursuing two distinct purposes: one related to the earth with earthly people and earthly objectives involved, which is Judaism; while the other is related to heaven with heavenly people and heavenly objectives, which is Christianity.”³³

Two Distinct Purposes. This overriding theological conviction determines the dispensational interpretation of Biblical prophecies. A clear distinction is maintained between what the Bible predicts regarding Israel and what it predicts about the Church. What the Scripture says about Israel, it is claimed, cannot be applied to the Church and vice versa.

The reason for the radical distinction between Israel and the Church, as stated unambiguously by C. C. Ryrie, is that “the Church is not fulfilling in any sense the promises to Israel . . . The Church age is not seen in God’s program for Israel. It is an intercalation.”³⁴ In other words, God views Israel and the Church as *two distinct peoples* for whom He has *two distinct purposes*. Consequently, dispensationalists maintain that many Old Testament prophecies which have not yet been fulfilled in the future through a literal Israel.

Evaluation of the “Two Peoples” View

Is this concept of a radical distinction between God’s plan for Israel and that for the Church a valid Biblical teaching or a gratuitous assumption? Does the New Testament view the Church as a people different and separated from the people of “natural Israel”? The answer, as will be shown, is abundantly clear. The New Testament views the Church, not as a temporary “intercalation,” but as the continuation of the true Israel or God. To verify the latter, brief allusion will be made to some significant statements of Christ, Peter, and Paul.

Christ’s Gathering of the True Israel. By calling and ordaining twelve disciples as His apostles, Christ manifested His intent to gather the messianic remnant of the twelve tribes of Israel into a new organism, called the Church (Matt 16:18-19). The latter is not an independent organism designed to replace Israel *temporarily*, but rather is a fold that gathers both “the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matt 10:6; cf. 15:24; Acts 1:8) and the lost sheep of the Gentile world.

Referring to Isaiah’s prophecy regarding the gathering of Gentiles, Christ announced: “I have other sheep, that are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will heed my voice. So there shall be one flock, one shepherd” (John 10:16; cf. Is 56:6-8). As the messianic Shepherd, Christ came to gather the remnant of Israel and of the Gentiles, not into two separate flocks, but into one flock.

When commending the faith of the Roman centurion, Jesus said: “I tell you, many will come from east and west and sit at the table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, while the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness? (Matt 8:11-12). It is noteworthy that Christ did not promise the Kingdom of God to a future generation of Jews, as some dispensationalists maintain, but to believers of all nations, “from east and west.”³⁵

A Present Reality. The messianic Kingdom promised in the Old Testament is seen by Christ not as a future realization involving the territorial and political restoration of Israel, but as a present reality which has dawned through His victorious ministry over sin, Satan, and death. “If it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons,” Christ said, “then the kingdom of God has come upon you” (Matt 12:28). Christ’s kingdom is composed, not of two separate peoples, Israel and the Church, but of one people, the “New Israel,” consisting of believing Jews and Gentiles.

To His disciples Jesus said: “Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give *you* the kingdom” (Luke 12:32).³⁶ Note that the promised messianic Kingdom is given not to a future generation of Jews, but to the “little flock” of the true Israel, consisting of all those who accept and follow the Messiah Jesus (Matt 11:29; 13:38; 8:11-12). F. F. Bruce aptly comments: “Jesus’ calling of disciples around Himself to form the ‘little flock’ who were to receive the kingdom (Luke 12:32; cf. Dan 7:22, 27) marks Him out as the founder of the New Israel.”³⁷

The prophets speak of Israel as God’s flock or sheep (Is 40:11; Jer 31:10; Ezek 34:12-14). Christ, by calling His disciples the “little flock” to whom God was giving the Kingdom, is unmistakably identifying His disciples as the true remnant of Israel. Moreover, by commissioning His apostles to “make disciples of all nations” (Matt 28:19), Christ revealed that the prophetic mission of national Israel (Is 49:6; 60:3) was being fulfilled by His messianic flock, the Church, which consists of disciples from all nations. Israel continues to exist not apart from, but as part of, the Church.

Peter’s Description of the New Israel. Peter, like Christ, saw the Church as the fulfillment of the promises made to ancient Israel. On the day of Pentecost Peter declared that Joel’s prophecy regarding the messianic restoration of Israel (Joel 2:28-32) was being fulfilled through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the Church (Acts 2:16-21).

For Peter, the Church is not an unpredicted entity in the Old Testament, nor a temporary interruption of God’s plan for Israel; but it is rather the realization of the eschatological remnant of Israel. If the beginning of the Church is seen by Peter as the fulfillment of a prophecy regarding Israel, we

have reason to believe that the closing events of the Church may also represent the fulfillment of certain Old Testament prophecies regarding Israel.

The Church is the New Israel. It is noteworthy that Peter applies to the Church those Old Testament titles which designate Israel: “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were no people but now you are God’s people” (1 Pet 2:9-10).

This description of the Church is a composite of three Old Testament passages (Ex 19:6; Is 43:20-21; Hos 1:6, 9; 2:1) which characterize God’s people. Peter draws together the sweep of the Old Testament view of Israel and proclaims its fulfillment in the church. In the plainest words, then, Peter shows that the “chosen race” is no longer exclusively ethnic Jews, but both Jewish and Gentile believers. The Church is the new Israel that fulfills the promises made to Old Testament Israel.

Paul’s view of “the Israel of God.” Like Christ and Peter, Paul also viewed the Church as the true Israel. Speaking to the Jews gathered in the synagogue at Antioch of Pisidia, Paul said: “We bring you the good news that what God promised to the fathers, this he has fulfilled to us their children by raising Jesus” (Acts 13:32-33).

In this speech Paul explains that God’s promises to the fathers have been fulfilled in Christ’s resurrection. This fulfillment results not in the establishment of a Jewish kingdom during the millennium, but rather in “forgiveness of sins” granted through Christ to “everyone that believes” (Acts 13:38-39). The promises made to Israel are therefore fulfilled in the New Testament Church, not through political restoration of ethnic Jews but through a spiritual redemption of all believers.

In his epistle to the Galatians Paul uses the phrase “the Israel of God” inclusive of both Jews and Gentiles: “Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is a new creation. Peace and mercy to all who follow this rule, even to the Israel of God” (Gal 6:15-16, NIV). Some dispensationalists maintain that the phrase “the Israel of God” refers exclusively to believing Jews. They translate the Greek word *kai* as “and,” meaning “in addition to.” Thus “the Israel of God” refers exclusively to Christian Jews which Paul allegedly distinguishes from the church as a whole because they had forsaken legalism to follow the rule of Christ.³⁸

Unity of Jews and Gentiles. The problem with this interpretation is that it ignores both the immediate context and larger theological emphasis of

Galatians. The immediate context speaks of “all who follow this rule” and this must include believing Jews and believing Gentiles because it is said that neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything. Thus “the Israel of God” is a further description of both groups “who follow this rule.”

The larger context emphasizes the unity that both Jews and Gentiles share in Christ: “There is neither Jew nor Greek, . . . for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ’s then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise” (Gal 3:28-29).

In the light of the immediate and larger context, “the Israel of God” cannot be a distinct group of believing Jews, separated from believing Gentiles. To argue for such a distinction means to destroy the very unity Paul endeavors to establish. Rather the phrase “Israel of God” was used by Paul in an explanatory way to further qualify “all who follow this rule,” namely, believing Jews and Gentiles.

Paul’s Integration of Gentiles into Israel. Paul teaches repeatedly the integration of Gentiles into Israel as heirs of God’s promises. In Ephesians Paul clearly explains that the Gentiles who at one time were “separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise” (Eph 2:12), are not “no longer strangers and sojourners, but . . . fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God” (Eph 2:19).

This integration of Gentiles into “the commonwealth of Israel” and into “the covenants of promise” has taken place through Jesus Christ Who has made both Jews and Gentiles “*one* new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in *one* body through the cross, thereby bringing the hostility to an end” (Eph 2:15-16).³⁹

The thought of a separate purpose for believing Jews in the present age or in a future millennium is here totally excluded by Paul. In fact, such a thought would destroy the very oneness of Jews and Gentiles which Christ has realized. Paul explains to the Ephesians that it was by revelation that God made known to him this “mystery” of how “through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs *together* with Israel, members *together* of one body, and sharers *together* in the promise in Christ Jesus” (Eph 3:5-6, NIV).⁴⁰ Three times Paul stresses here that Gentiles share *together* with Israel in the covenant promise. Any theological system that divides what God has joined together is working against the divine purpose.

Paul’s Imagery of the Olive Tree. In Romans 9-11 Paul describes the integration of Gentiles into Israel by using the effective imagery of engrafting

wild olive branches (Gentiles) into the one olive tree of the Israel of God (Rom 11:17-24). Note that for Paul the salvation of the Gentiles results not in the shooting forth of a new olive tree, but rather in the ingrafting of Gentiles into the same olive tree.

The tree of Israel is not uprooted because of unbelief, but rather is pruned, that is, restructured through the ingrafting of the Gentile branches. The Church lives from the root and trunk of the Old Testament Israel (Rom 11:17-18). By means of this expressive imagery Paul describes the unity and continuity that exists in God's redemptive plan for Israel and the Church.

Interrelation Between Israel and the Church. Dispensationalists appeal to Romans 11:25-26 to argue for a future conversion and blessedness of the nation of Israel, independently from the Church. The passage reads: "I want you to understand this mystery, brethren: a hardening has come upon part of Israel, until the full number of the Gentiles come in, and so all Israel will be saved" (Rom 11:25-26). Dispensationalists explain this passage as teaching a large-scale conversion of the nation of Israel after the ingathering of the fullness of the Gentiles is complete, just before or at the time of Christ's Return.

This interpretation ignores four important observations. First, the phrase "all Israel will be saved" can hardly refer only to the last generation of Jews, since the latter would be only a fraction of all the Jews who ever lived. Second, the text is not discussing the temporal succession, but rather the manner in which Israel will be saved. It does not say "and *then* [after the ingathering of the Gentiles] all Israel will be saved." Rather it says: "And *so* [in this way, as the Israelites are moved to jealousy by the salvation of the Gentiles] all Israel will be saved."

Third, the Jews are being saved by being regrafted into the same olive tree in which the Gentiles are grafted. Thus the salvation of the Jews occurs not independently from, but together with, that of the Gentiles.

Lastly, if the gathering of the full number of the Gentiles takes place throughout history, there is no reason to believe that the gathering of the fullness of the Jews should be different. In fact, in v. 31 (NIV) Paul specifically says that the Jews "have *now* become disobedient in order that they too may *now* receive mercy as a result of God's mercy to you."⁴¹ These observations clearly indicate that Paul is here presenting not an order of successive dispensations but a promise of dynamic interrelation between the salvation of Israel and that of the Church.

Conclusion. The sampling of testimonies we have considered from Jesus, Peter, and Paul suffices to show that although the New Testament often

speaks 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.

The New Testament emphasizes the existing unity between Israel and the Church. In the New Jerusalem are inscribed both the names of the twelve tribes of Israel and the names of the twelve apostles, the former on the twelve gates and the latter on the twelve foundations (Rev 21:12, 14). The Church and Israel thus share together not only in the same present salvation but also in the same ultimate glorification and restoration. The future of Israel is seen in the New Testament, not in terms of a millennial political kingdom in Palestine, but rather in terms of everlasting blessedness shared together with the redeemed of all ages in a restored new earth.

PART THREE

THREE MISTAKEN ADVENT SIGNS

The two basic dispensational principles of prophetic interpretation, examined above, have influenced the construction of the imaginative scenario of End-time events which we have described in the first part of the chapter. An analysis of all the major events of such a scenario would take us beyond the limited scope of this book. Thus we shall focus our attention merely on three mistaken and misleading Advent signs: the restoration of the Jews to Palestine, the Rapture, and the rebuilding of the Jerusalem Temple.

1. The Restoration of the Jews to Palestine

In view of the fundamental importance attached to the recent establishment of the Jewish State in Palestine—an event which is seen by many as the fulfillment of the key prophetic sign of the nearness of Christ's Return—priority will be given to the examination of this alleged Advent sign.

A Fulfillment of Prophecy? It is widely believed among Evangelical Christians that the steady return of Jews to Palestine during this century, and the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, represent an amazing fulfillment of specific Old Testament promises made to the Israelites. Furthermore, this alleged fulfillment is viewed as the prelude to such final events as the Rapture, the Tribulation, the rebuilding of the Jerusalem Temple, the conversion of the Jews, the Return of Christ, and the establishment of the millennial Jewish kingdom ruled over by Christ from David's throne in Jerusalem.

Leon J. Wood aptly expresses this popular view in *The Bible and Future Events*: “The clearest sign of Christ’s return is the modern state of Israel . . . One should realize that God’s timetable could call for Israel to be in the land for many years before bringing the fruition of the age. But with the nation actually there, and with many factors concerning it fitting into conditions set forth in Scripture for the last days, . . . one may safely believe that Christ’s coming is not far in the future.”⁴²

Hal Lindsey is even more specific by asserting that the political restoration of Israel in 1948 is not only “one of the most important events of our age,” but also “the most important prophetic sign to herald the era of Christ’s return.”⁴³ He even boldly predicted in 1970 that “within forty years or so of 1948, all these things could take place.”⁴⁴

A Remarkable Event. To say the least, the return of many Jews to Palestine and the establishment of the State of Israel are most remarkable happenings. So it is not surprising that many Christians and Jews see in these events which have transpired in the Middle East the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies. But is this a legitimate interpretation of prophecies?

It is quite possible to believe *personally* that the Jewish people have a moral or historical right to the land of Palestine and that God has providentially led in the establishment of the State of Israel, but can such a belief be legitimately grounded on Biblical prophecies? To answer this question, it is necessary briefly to examine at least some of the prophecies generally adduced in support of this belief.

Old Testament Restoration Prophecies

God’s Promises to Israelites. There is, first, God’s promise to Abraham that his descendants would inherit “all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession” (Gen 17:8; cf. 12:7; 13:15; 15:18). In addition there are promises in some of the prophets that speak of a “second” return of the Israelites (Is 11:11) to their homeland “from all the nations” (Jer 29:14). Dispensationalists believe that this predicted return is supposed to be in unbelief (Ezek 36:24-26; cf. Jer 30). They find confirmation for such a belief in what is taking place today.

The restoration promises are viewed as unconditional literal promises whose fulfillment began for the first time in 1948 with the dramatic recovery of part of Palestine by the Jews. Previous possessions and dispossessions of the land of Canaan by the Israelites supposedly do not fulfill God’s territorial promises for at least two reasons. First, God promised not temporary but “everlasting possession” of the land (Gen 17:8). Second, the Israelites have never possessed in the past all the promised land “from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates” (Gen 15:18).⁴⁵

Conditional Nature of God's Promise. The above literalistic interpretation of God's territorial promises ignores first of all their conditional nature. God's promise of land to Abraham's progeny was conditional on a continuing obedience to His covenant requirements: "God said to Abraham, 'As for you, you shall keep my covenant, you and your descendants after you throughout their generations'" (Gen 17:9; cf. 18:19).

The conditional nature of the promise of the land in the Abrahamic covenant is clearly recognized in the Scriptures. Moses, for example, after the Kadesh rebellion, reminded the new generation that disobedience prevented their parents from entering the land of promise: "Not one of these men of this evil generation shall see the good land which I swore to give to your fathers" (Deut 1:35; cf. Num 14:22-23).

Anticipating the expulsion of the Israelites from the land on account of disobedience, Moses admonished the people to "return to the Lord," who in turn would remember "the covenant with your fathers which he swore to them" (Deut 4:30-31; cf. Deut 30:2, 3; I Kings 8:47-50).

The conditional nature of God's promises is perhaps best stated in Jeremiah 18:9-10 where the Lord declares: "If at any time I declare concerning a nation or a kingdom that I will build and plant it, and if it does evil in my sight, not listening to my voice, then I will repent of the good which I had intended to do it."

The principles established in this passage is that God's predictions of weal or woe for a nation are *conditional* upon obedience or disobedience. Obviously it is only by God's grace that believers can fulfill the conditions, but the fact remains that the conditions are there and no one has the right to take the "ifs" out of the Bible.

The Return in Unbelief. Dispensationalists refuse to apply the principle of the conditional nature of God's promises to the predictions regarding the return of the Jews to Palestine. They appeal to passages such as Ezekiel 22:17 and 36:24-28 to argue that "the Jews are to be gathered back to the land in a state of unbelief. The national conversion to Jesus Christ their Messiah will not take place until after they are restored to the land."⁴⁶ In other words, the territorial restoration of the Jews is supposed to precede their conversion to the Messiah.

Unfortunately, this belief is based on a misinterpretation of certain Biblical texts. For example, the statement found in Ezekiel 22:19-20, "I will gather you in my anger and in my wrath," is taken to refer to the present emigration of the Jews to Palestine in unbelief.

This interpretation is erroneous for at least two reasons. First of all, in the preceding verses Ezekiel is describing not the future but the contemporary situation of the Israelites by enumerating their sins which will cause God to scatter them “among the nations” (v. 15). Second, the gathering of the Jews “in my anger and in my wrath” refers not to their return to Palestine in unbelief, but to the finality of God’s judgment upon their disobedience which historically took place through the Babylonian invasions and captivity.

This passage leaves no doubt that the purpose of the gathering is for judgment, not restoration. This is clear in the following verse where the Lord says: “I will gather you and blow upon you with the fire of my wrath, and you shall be melted in the midst of it” (Ezek 22:21). Thus the *gathering* in Ezekial, like the *assembling* in Jeremiah (8:14), is for the purpose not of restoration and salvation but of judgment and destruction.

Regathering and Cleansing. The second “proof text” generally cited to support the return-in-unbelief view, is Ezekiel 36:24-25: “For I will take you from the nations, and gather you from all the countries, and bring you into your own land. I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleans you.” The fact that the promise of territorial restoration precedes the spiritual cleansing of the people in this passage is taken to mean that first the Jews will return to Palestine in unbelief and *afterwards* they will be cleansed and redeemed.

This conclusion is based on an artificial chronological sequence which cannot be derived from the passage. Ezekial is not saying that the Lord first will regather the Israelites and then at a subsequent period He will cleanse them. He simply declares that God will do two things for His people: He will regather and cleanse them. No hint is given that the two events will be separated by an undetermined length of time.

The context of the chapter suggests that the regathering and the cleansing will take place at the same time, with the spiritual cleansing *preceding* rather than following the regathering: “On that day that I cleanse you from all your iniquities, I will cause the cities to be inhabited, and the waste places shall be rebuilt” (Ezek 36:33). Observations such as these clearly show that Ezekiel 36:24-28 offers no proof for a twentieth-century return of the Jews in unbelief to Palestine.

Two Biblical Principles. Further support for this conclusion is provided by two basic Biblical teachings regarding the land of promise. First, historically it was unbelief that prevented the Israelites from entering the land of Canaan (Num 14:23; Ps 95:7, 11). This truth is reiterated by the author of Hebrews when he emphasizes that unbelief disqualifies anyone from entering

the rest which the Sabbath typifies, whether it be the political rest in the land of Canaan (Heb 3:18-19; 4:6-8) or the spiritual rest of salvation (Heb 4:3, 9, 10). If unbelief prevented the initial entrance into the land of Canaan, it can hardly provide the condition accompanying a return to it.

Second, God rewards obedience, not disobedience, with the covenant privileges. The restoration predicted by the prophets is conditional in character. Israel will be restored “*if they repent* with all their mind and with all their heart in the land of their enemies” (1 King 8:38; cf. Hosea 11:10, 11; Deut 30: 2, 3, 9, 10).⁴⁷

A “Second” Gathering. Another prophecy viewed by many as a proof text for the present reconstitution of Israel is found in Isaiah 11:11: “in that day the Lord will extend his hand yet a second time to recover the remnant which is left of his people, from Assyria, from Egypt, from Pathros, from Ethiopia, from Elam, from Shinar, from Hamath, and from the coastlands of the sea.”

Isaiah’s reference to “a second” gathering of the remnant of Israel from many nations is viewed as being fulfilled today for the first time with the return of some Jews to the reconstituted State of Israel. The latter is seen as the prelude to the final regathering of Israel, which, to use J. F. Walvoord’s words, “will have its culmination when Israel’s Messiah returns to the earth in power and glory to reign.”⁴⁸

This view rests on the assumption that the “second” gathering predicted by Isaiah was not fulfilled when a faithful remnant of Israel returned from Babylon to Jerusalem in 536 B.C. under Zerubbabel and again in 457 B.C. under Ezra. Two main reasons are generally given. First, the return from the Babylonian exile was only from one nation, Babylon, and not “from all the nations” (Jer 29:14; cf. Is 11:11). Second, the return from the Babylonian exile was but a pale reflection of the grandiose return envisioned by Ezekiel, Jeremiah, and Isaiah.

A Return “From All the Nations.” The first reason ignores three significant facts. First, it was customary at that time to sell prisoners of war to other nations, so that they were dispersed far and wide (Joel 3:7; Jer 42-44; Ezek 27:13; Amos 1:6, 9). In a gradual return from captivity it would be natural for some of the widely dispersed Jews to go back to Palestine from many countries. This is what apparently took place after the Babylonian exile, since those who returned did not belong exclusively to the tribe of Judah but also to the other tribes as well (Ezra 2:59; 1 Chron. 9:33, 34).

Second, the prophets sometimes fuse together references to a return from “the land of their captivity” (i.e. Babylon) with a return from “all the nations,”

because to their minds these expressions were simply variant ways of describing the condition of the Jews in exile and God's promised restoration. A good example is found in Jeremiah 30:10-11, where the two expressions are used interchangeably in the same passage: "Fear not, O Jacob my servant, . . . for lo, I will save you from afar, and your offspring from the land of their captivity . . . I will make a full end of all the nations among whom I scattered you" (cf. Jer 31:8, 11; 46:27).

Third, to apply literally and consistently Isaiah's prediction of "a second" gathering of Israel from many nations to the contemporary return of the Jews to Palestine would require that the Jews destroy or plunder or subjugate the Philistines, the Edomites, and Moabites, and the Ammonites, as stated in the context of Isaiah's prophecy: "They shall swoop down upon the shoulder of the Philistines in the west, and together they shall plunder the people of the east. They shall put forth their hand against Edom and Moab, and the Ammonites shall obey them" (Is 11:14). Since these nations have long ago disappeared, it is hard to see how the Jews today could fulfill literally Isaiah's prediction of "a second" gathering.

This fanciful prophetic interpretation could be avoided simply by carefully reading the context, which clearly speaks of "a second" return of a remnant from Assyria, in relation to the first return from Egypt under Moses: "There will be a highway from Assyria for the remnant which is left of his people, as there was for Israel when they came up from the land of Egypt" (Is 11:16). Assyria is mentioned first (also in v. 11) presumably because Isaiah wrote these words after the Northern Kingdom had been deported to Assyria in 721 B.C. Thus this prophecy had a literal fulfillment when the Israelites returned from captivity in the sixth century B.C.

Limited Return from Babylonian Captivity. The second reason maintains that the trickle of Jews who returned to Palestine under Zerubbabel in 536 B.C. and under Ezra in 457 B.C. was only a pale reflection of the grandiose return envisioned by the prophets. Moreover, the Jews did not experience the economic prosperity and agricultural fertility predicted by the prophets (Is 35:1; 61:4). The surrounding nations were not destroyed and continued to threaten the Jews again and again. Consequently, one must look allegedly for a later fulfillment in the events of our time.

The return of the Jews to the land is now in progress. Israel has become the strongest military power of the Middle East. The soil is being reclaimed after centuries of neglect, through the diversion of water from the Jordan to irrigate the Negev desert. These developments have led many Christians to

believe that the restoration prophecies are indeed being fulfilled today. A travel advertisement in *Christianity Today* (October 27, 1967) aptly expresses this popular belief: “Is Prophecy Being Fulfilled in the Bible Lands Today? Come and See.”

Threefold Fulfillment of Restoration Prophecies

It can hardly be disputed that the restoration prophecies were not completely fulfilled in the post-exilic period and that it is appropriate to look for a fuller fulfillment at a later time. However, in looking for a greater fulfillment it is important to recognize that prophecies regarding the Land of Canaan and the restoration of Israel may be fulfilled in a threefold way: *literally*, *figuratively*, and *antitypically*.

Literal Fulfillment. God’s territorial promise to Abraham’s progeny was first fulfilled *literally* several times. Joshua, for example, declares: “The Lord gave to Israel all the land which he swore to give to their father: and having taken possession of it, they settled there . . . Not one of all the good promises which the Lord had made to the house of Israel had failed; all came to pass” (Josh 21:43, 45; cf. 1 Kings 8:56; Jer 32:21-23).

Similarly, the promised restoration of the Jews to Palestine predicted by the prophets found an initial *literal* fulfillment when a remnant of the Jews returned under Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah. Jeremiah, for example, in the same passage where he announces the restoration of the Jews “from all the nations” (Jer 29:14), explicitly explains when the promised restoration would take place: “Thus says the Lord: When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will visit you, and I will fulfill to you my promise and bring you back to this place” (Jer 29:10). Daniel correctly understood that this prophecy would be fulfilled not at a distant future but in his own time (Dan 9:2).

Figurative Fulfillment. God’s promise of the land to Abraham’s progeny and of the restoration of Israel have also been fulfilled in a second way, *figuratively*. The New Testament explains that the land and blessings promised to Abraham’s posterity have been fulfilled not only *literally*, in the past return of the Jews to Palestine, but also *figuratively* in and through the coming of Christ, Who is the intent and content of God’s covenant with Abraham (Acts 3:25-26; 13:16, 32-33).

Paul explains that the promises which God “made to Abraham and to his offspring” (Gal 3:16) have been fulfilled through Christ, because He is the epitome of the true seed of Abraham. The fulfillment, however, consists not in a future repossession of Palestine by the Jews, but rather in the inheritance of the whole renewed earth by believers in Christ from all nations (Rom 4:13; Matt 5:5, 3; Rev 21:1-8).

Ingathering of the Gentiles. Not only God’s territorial promise to Abraham’s progeny, but also the later predictions regarding the restoration of Israel, are seen in the New Testament as fulfilled figuratively through the coming of Christ. At the Jerusalem Council, for example, after Peter, Paul, and Barnabas reported how God brought many Gentiles into the faith, James, who apparently presided over the council, said: “Brethren, listen to me. Simeon has related how God first visited the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name. And with this the words of the prophets agree, as it is written ‘After this I will return, and I will rebuild the dwelling of David, which has fallen; I will rebuild its ruins, and I will set it up, that the rest of men may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who are called by my name, says that Lord, who has made these things known from of old’” (Acts 15:14-18).

James here quotes Amos’s prophecy regarding the restoration of David’s kingdom (Amos 9:11-12) which would bring about the ingathering of the Gentiles, and declares that this prophecy was being fulfilled through the ingathering of the Gentiles into the community of God’s people. We have here a clear example of a figurative New Testament fulfillment of an Old Testament prophecy regarding the restoration of Israel.

Noteworthy is the change made by James in translating Amos’s prophecy. Amos’s phrase “that they may possess the remnant of Edom” (Amos 9:12), becomes in Acts 15:17, “that the rest of men may seek the Lord.” What this means is that James saw the fulfillment of Amos’s prophecy not in a future political restoration of the Davidic dynasty that would militarily gain possession of the remnants of Edom, but rather in the spiritual reign of Christ which is voluntarily sought by believers. Here, then, the New Testament interprets figuratively an Old Testament prophecy regarding the restoration of Israel.

Antitypical Fulfillment. Prophecies about the Promised Land and the restoration of Israel will also be ultimately fulfilled *antitypically*—that is, in the final possession by all of God’s people of the new earth of which Canaan was a type. The Scripture indicates that the land of Canaan was a type of the inheritance of God’s people in the new earth. Hebrews explains that Abraham and his believing descendants saw the ultimate fulfillment of the promised land of Canaan, not in a return to “that land from which they had gone out,” but rather in reaching “a better country, that is, a heavenly one” (Heb 11:15-16). Consequently Abraham, who had been promised the land of Canaan, “looked forward to the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God” (Heb 11:10).

The future “holy city” (Rev 21:10), to which Abraham looked forward, will be the antitypical fulfillment of God’s promise to him of the everlasting

possession of the land of Canaan. This promise will be fulfilled on the new earth for all the spiritual descendants of Abraham, believing Jews and believing Gentiles. Paul emphasizes this truth when he writes: “If you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise” (Gal 3:29). As believers we are “heirs” to God’s promise made to Abraham regarding the land of Canaan. This promise will be ultimately fulfilled when we reach the “better country” and “inherit the world” (Heb 11:6; Rom 4:13).

Messianic Restoration. The antitypical fulfillment also applies to the prophecies regarding the gathering of Israel from the dispersion. Isaiah’s prediction of “a second” gathering of the remnant of Israel (Is 11:11) is given in the context of the Coming of the Messiah as a glorious Judge who “shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall slay the wicked” (Is 11:4). The outcome of this final judgment will be peace, justice, and harmony in the natural world, “for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea” (Is 11:5-9).

At the time of the final messianic restoration just described, “the Lord will extend his hand yet a second time to recover the remnant” from many nations (Is 11:11). What this means is that Isaiah forecasts the second gathering of Israel, not merely to the land of Canaan, but to the Messiah Himself at the time when He will come as a Judge to restore justice, peace, and prosperity to this world. This gathering is not only for Israel, but for all believers from many nations. (Is 11:11).

The New Testament envisions this final gathering of believers from all nations at the glorious Return of Christ. At that time, “He will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other” (Matt 24:31). This final gathering will be not to the Middle East, but “from one end of heaven to the other” to the Savior. This is Christ’s final antitypical fulfillment of Isaiah’s predicted second gathering (cf. Matt 8:11-12).

Deeper Meaning of Israel and Canaan. The question could be asked: Why then do the Old Testament prophets speak so plainly of a national restoration of Israel to its land, when the ultimate fulfillment of these prophecies is the inheritance of the new earth by the believers of all the ages? The answer is to be found in the fact that the Old Testament prophets often describe the ultimate blessedness by means of terms and experiences familiar to the Israelites of their days.

For the prophets the term *Israel* signified the people of God and the *land of Canaan* represented the promised blessings of peace and prosperity.

Because of these deeper meanings, these terms could serve to express the hope for the ultimate realization of God's blessings for His people.

We noted in Chapter 2 that the "prophetic perspective" enabled the prophets to see the final divine visitation and restoration through the transparency of imminent historical events. In the same way the final gathering of all believers (Is 11:11; 49:6) is sometimes described by the prophets in terms of the regathering of the remnant of Israel to its land.

The above considerations on the *literal*, *figurative*, and *antitypical* fulfillments of the Old Testament prophecies regarding the restoration of Israel lead us to conclude that there is a sense in which these prophecies were not fully realized in Old Testament times. However, their fuller realization must be sought, not in a political restoration of the Jews in Palestine, but in the universal gathering of all believers in the new earth.

To limit the fulfillment of these prophecies to a political restoration of the Jews in Palestine, whether it be now or during the millennium, is to ignore the witness of the New Testament which sees these prophecies fulfilled not in some future return of the Jews to Palestine but in the present gathering of believers into the church and in a future universal gathering of people from all tribes, peoples, and tongues in the new earth.

"The Times of the Gentiles." One of the prophecies most quoted by dispensationalists to support the present return of the Jews to the city of Jerusalem is Luke 21:24: "Jerusalem will be trodden down by the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled."⁴⁹ Many Christians believe that this prophecy was fulfilled for the first time on June 6, 1967, when the Jews recaptured the Old City of Jerusalem, thus terminating its "treading down" by the Gentiles.

The reasoning for this view is aptly expressed by a leading dispensationalist theologian, C. F. Baker: "If this city is trodden down *until* a certain time, there must of necessity come a time following that when the city will not be trodden down . . . If this Scripture teaches anything, it teaches that the earthly Jerusalem is to be restored."⁵⁰ Such reasoning sounds logical but it rests on a gratuitous interpretation of the adverb "until," besides ignoring Christ's overall teachings on this subject.

The primary function of the adverb "until" in the phrase "until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled" is to indicate the *termination* of the treading down of Jerusalem but not its *restoration* to a previous state of Jewish sovereignty. The adverb "until" (*achri*) in itself does not suggest a change to a previous situation. For example, in the admonition "Hold fast what you have, until I

come” (Rev 2:25), the adverb “until” does not convey the idea of a change from a present condition of faithfulness to a previous condition of unfaithfulness (cf. Rev 2:10; 1 Cor 15:25).

In this statement Jesus simply says that for Jerusalem the condition of being trampled underfoot will not cease within fifty or a hundred years, but will continue right on *until* His Second Coming. The event which follows the fulfillment of “the times of the Gentiles” is not the restoration of Jewish sovereignty over the city of Jerusalem, but the Return of Christ (Luke 21:25-28).

Prediction of Destruction, not of Restoration. Note should be taken of the fact that in predicting the destruction of Jerusalem, Christ said nothing about its restoration. What Jesus taught instead is that the *special* status of the Jews as a people of God had come to an end (Matt 23:38; Luke 19:41-44). In the parable of the Tenants in the Vineyard, the unfaithful tenants do not regain possession of the Vineyard at a later time, but lose it forever, as God gives it “to a nation producing the fruits of it” (Matt 21:41-43).

The same truth is expressed in the parable of the Wedding Feast, where the place of those who were originally invited to the feast is taken by all sorts of other people brought in from the street (Matt 22:1-10). Those who “sit at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven” “come from east and west . . . while the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness” (Matt 8:11-12).

This description of people coming “from east and west” alludes to certain prophetic descriptions of the return of the Jews from exile (cf. Is 43:5; Ps 107:3). Yet here Jesus clearly applies these prophecies to the gathering of *all believing people*, Jews and Gentiles. The New Testament foresees not the return of the Jews to a restored Jerusalem but the gathering of all believers to the New Jerusalem built by God Himself (Rev 21-22).

Conclusion. The unmistakable conclusion that emerges from this study of the major restoration prophecies is that none of these offers a forecast or even a hint of a restoration of the Jews to Palestine in our century as a prelude to the final events of earth’s history.

We have found that the Scripture sees these prophecies as fulfilled *literally* when a remnant of Jews returned to Palestine from Babylon; *figuratively* when Christ came the first time to gather spiritually all believers unto Himself; and *antitypically* when Christ will return to gather physically His people “from one end of heaven to the other” to the new earth.

The view that the political restoration of the Jews in 1948 is “the most important prophetic sign to herald the era of Christ’s return”⁵¹ is, then, a view

which has no legitimate Biblical support. Unfortunately, however, such a mistaken view is the very basis upon which rests the popular scenario of End-time events described in the first part of this chapter.

2. The Rapture

Definition of “Secret Rapture.” Closely related to the restoration of the Jews to Palestine is a second major mistaken Advent sign which is commonly expected today, namely the so-called *secret rapture* of the Church. As noted in the first part of this chapter, dispensationalists believe that Christ’s Second Coming will occur in two distinct phases.

The first phase is known as the “*secret rapture*” of the Church and can happen at any moment. At this time Christ comes down only partway to the earth to resurrect the sleeping saints and to transform and glorify living believers. Both groups are then raptured, that is, snatched away secretly, suddenly, and invisibly, to meet the descending Lord in the air. This body of believers, called the “Church,” will then go up to heaven to celebrate with Christ for seven years the marriage feast of the Lamb.

The secret rapture of the Church to heaven marks the beginning of the so-called *great tribulation* which is to last seven years, during which the numerous events listed in the first part of this chapter are to take place. At the end of this seven-year period, the second phase of Christ’s Coming, generally called the *Return* or the *Revelation*, will occur. Christ then comes in glory *with* the saints all the way down to the earth to destroy His enemies in the Battle or Armageddon, to set up His throne in Jerusalem and to begin His millennial terrestrial reign.

Importance of the Rapture

Beginning of Final Countdown. For many sincere and often misled Christians, the secret, “any moment” rapture of the church is a most important and imminent Advent sign. It is important because it is supposed to signal the countdown to the last seven years of earth’s history which will culminate with the visible Return of Christ. It is imminent because its main preconditions, namely the reestablishment of the State of Israel and the repossession of ancient Jerusalem, have already taken place.

How soon, then, will occur this mass disappearance of millions of true Christians from every nation? Many have been led to believe that this event could happen now, suddenly, at any moment. This belief is expressed on bumper stickers like the one that warns: “*If the driver disappears, grab the wheel.*”

Already Overdue. According to Hal Lindsey's initial calculations this secret rapture of the church, or as he prefers to call it, "the great snatch,"⁵² is already overdue. In 1970 he predicted that "within forty years or so of 1948 [the year of the formation of the modern State of Israel] all these things could take place."⁵³ Lindsey derives the "forty years" from the Biblical duration of a generation and argues on the basis of the parable of the Fig Tree (Matt 24:32-33) that the formation of the State of Israel in 1948 marks the beginning of the last "generation" (Matt 24:34) that will see first the rapture, then the seven years of tribulation, and finally the Return of Christ in glory. Since the rapture, according to Lindsey and the majority of dispensationalists, takes place seven years (Dan 9:27) before Christ's visible Return in glory, it should already have occurred by 1981 or 1982. What this means is that time has already run out on such sensational but senseless predictions.

To resolve this dilemma Lindsey is now shifting his emphasis away from the fixed event of 1948 to floating events occurring in our time. This enables him to buy some extra time. In his recent 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."⁵⁴

Lindsey now uses such indefinite time references 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.⁵⁵

The combination of bold assertions and covert revision is the common symptom of the painful awareness caused by unfulfilled predictions. Unfortunately, many uncritical believers fail to recognize this symptom and keep on believing the newly revised predictions, even if the previous ones are proved to be false. It would seem that some people would rather believe in wrong predictions than in none at all.

The Rise, Expansion, and Decline of Pretribulationism

The Origin of Pretribulationism. The belief that the church will be raptured suddenly and secretly before the final, great tribulation, is known as *pretribulationism*. Its origin is generally traced back to the 1830s. Recently Dave MacPherson has presented evidence suggesting that the seed ideas of this theory were first put forward by a Scottish young woman, Margaret MacDonald. In the early part of 1830 she had a vision in which she saw some Christians removed from this earth before the fiery trial and the appearance of the antichrist.⁵⁶ In all fairness it must be said that this vision refers only to a partial Rapture and does not posit a full seven years of tribulation between the secret Rapture and the Return of Christ.

MacPherson argues that Margaret's vision influenced J. N. Darby, the Plymouth Brethren leader who visited her in her home. While this is possible, the sources MacPherson presents hardly justify his charge that "Darby borrowed from her, modified her views, and then popularized them under his own name without giving her credit . . . Darby, then, did his part to draw attention away from the *real* origin of his special teaching."⁵⁷

The charge of plagiarism—expressed in the very title of MacPherson's book *The Incredible Cover-Up*—is in my view exaggerated. First, Margaret MacDonald's views are far from clear. Second, there was at that time a widespread interest in prophecy—as indicated by the numerous prophetic conferences—which could have facilitated the rise of pretribulationism in different minds. The fact remains, however, that John N. Darby became the most influential expositor and promulgator of the pretribulation rapture. Through his six visits to America and the extensive literature campaign of the Brethren, pretribulationism spread rapidly.

The Expansion of Pretribulationism. The period of the maximum expansion and predominance of pretribulationism was the first half of the twentieth century. Men like Arno C. Gaebelein, C. I. Scofield, James M. Gray at the Moody Bible Institute, Reuben A. Torrey at the Bible Institute of Los Angeles, Harry A. Ironside at the Moody Memorial Church, and Lewis Sperry Chafer at the Evangelical Theological College (now Dallas Theological Seminary) have played a major role in popularizing the pretribulation rapture.⁵⁸ The single most important factor was the wide circulation of the *Scofield Reference Bible*, published in 1909 and revised in 1917, which inculcated this teaching among the masses as the only correct Biblical view.

Resurgence of Posttribulationism. Since 1950 more and more evangelical scholars have been abandoning pretribulationism and returning to historic posttribulationism. The latter holds that the church will go through the great tribulation, at the end of which Christ will come to resurrect the sleeping saints and save the living believers.

Credit for the resurgence of posttribulationism must be given first of all to the influence of George E. Ladd, New Testament Professor at Fuller Theological Seminary. Some of his important books on this subject are *Crucial Questions About the Kingdom of God* (1952), *The Blessed Hope* (1956) and *The Last Things* (1978). His respected scholarship coupled with his commitment to evangelicalism have caused many evangelical scholars to rethink their pretribulation views.

The influence of Ladd can be seen in the following significant studies produced by scholars who have embraced posttribulationism and have

written in its defense: *The Greatness of the Kingdom* (1959) by Alva J. McClain, president of Grace Theological Seminary at Winona Lake, Indiana; *The Imminent Appearing of Christ* (1962) by J. Barton Payne, Old Testament Professor at Trinity Evangelical College; and *The Church and the Tribulation* (1973) by Robert H. Gundry, Professor of Religious Studies at Westmont College, California.⁵⁹

Studies such as these have influenced numerous scholars within traditionally pretribulationist institutions to return to historic posttribulationism. The Evangelical Free Church of America, for example, a past defender of the pretribulation Rapture, allowed professors from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School to challenge pretribulationism at their annual ministerial conference in January 1981. The challenges and the responses—published in 1984 as a symposium entitled *The Rapture: Pre-, Mid-, or Post-Tribulationist*—offer what is perhaps the most scholarly debate on the issues related to the Rapture.

It would thus seem that among evangelical scholars more and more are changing from pretribulationism to posttribulationism. For example, according to a poll taken by Dave MacPherson, of the forty-four contributing editors of *Christianity Today*, “only two or three . . . are still persistently pushing pretribulationism.”⁶⁰ This trend, however, as well as the recent origin of pretribulationism are not the reasons for regarding the secret rapture as a mistaken Advent sign. The correctness of a Christian belief is determined not by its antiquity nor by its popularity but rather by its solid Biblical support. It is the lack of such Biblical support that causes us to view the secret rapture as simply a human fiction.

A Mistaken Assumption. Even a cursory reading of pretribulation literature suffices to make a person aware of the fact that the belief in the secret rapture rests much more on assumptions than on Biblical teaching. The leading assumption is that God has a different plan for the Church than for Israel. Consequently, it is assumed that the Church must be removed from the earth before God can begin dealing with the Jews by causing them to be converted on a large scale through the experience of the great tribulation.

John F. Walvoord, a leading champion of the secret rapture, explicitly acknowledges the importance of this assumption when he writes: “The rapture question is determined more by ecclesiology than by eschatology,” that is to say, more by one’s understanding of the relation between the Church and Israel than by Biblical teachings regarding the End.⁶¹ C. C. Ryrie, another leading pretribulationist, expresses the same conviction, saying: “The distinction between Israel and the Church leads to the belief that the Church will be taken from the earth before the beginning of the tribulation (which in one major sense concerns Israel).”⁶²

Hal Lindsey goes so far as to make the distinction between Israel and the Church his “chief reason” for believing that “the Rapture occurs before the Tribulation.”⁶³ He argues that “if the Rapture took place at the same time as the second coming, there would be no mortals left who would be believers; therefore, there would be no one to go into the kingdom and repopulate the earth.”⁶⁴ In other words, since Lindsey assumes that the messianic Kingdom predicted by Old Testament prophets will be established by Christ at His Second Advent as an earthly kingdom consisting predominantly of mortal, believing Jews, then of necessity the rapture of the Church must take place before. How can Christ come to establish a millennial Jewish Kingdom on this earth, if all the believers are raptured away from this earth at His Coming?

Second Advent Split into Two Phases. To solve this dilemma, dispensationalists split the Second Advent into two phases: first an invisible Coming to secretly rapture the Church, and second a visible Coming seven years later to destroy the wicked and to establish the millennial Jewish Kingdom. The reasoning behind this construct may sound right, but it is wrong because it rests on the mistaken assumption that there is a radical distinction between God’s plan for Israel and that for the Church.

We have shown in the second part of this chapter that there is no Biblical support for a radical distinction between Israel and the Church. The future of Israel is seen in the New Testament, not as a separate millennial political kingdom in Palestine, but as everlasting blessedness shared together with the redeemed of all the ages in a restored new earth.

Unfortunately, it is this wrong assumption that determines the interpretation of Biblical texts adduced in support of the rapture. It is argued, for example, that a certain text cannot refer to the Church because it describes the great tribulation, which is supposed to be only for Israel. This kind of circular reasoning, based on a gratuitous assumption, is not the correct method of interpreting Bible texts. Conclusions must be drawn from careful exegesis, not from preconceived assumptions.

Four Reasons for Rejecting the Secret Rapture

A careful study of the Biblical texts relevant to the Return of Christ suggests at least *four major reasons* for rejecting the view of a two-stage Second Coming of Christ.

The Vocabulary of the Second Advent. The first reason for rejecting a pretribulation secret rapture is the fact that the vocabulary of the Second Advent offers no support for such a view. None of the three Greek terms used in the New Testament to describe the Return of Christ, namely, *parousia*—

coming, *apokalypsis*—revelation, and *epiphaneia*—appearing, suggest pretribulational secret rapture as the object of the Christian Advent Hope.

Pretribulationists claim that the word *parousia* is used by Paul in 1 Thessalonians 4:15 to describe the secret rapture. But in 1 Thessalonians 3:13 Paul uses the same word to describe “the coming of our Lord Jesus with *all* his saint”—a description, according to pretribulationists, of the second phase of Christ’s Return. Again in 2 Thessalonians 2:8 Paul employs the term *parousia* to refer to the Coming of Christ which will cause the destruction of the antichrist—an event which, according to pretribulationists, is supposed to happen at the second phase of Christ’s Coming.

Similarly the words *apokalypsis* and *epiphaneia* are used to describe both what pretribulationists call the rapture (1 Cor 1:7; 1 Tim 6:14) and what they call the Return or second phase of Christ’s Coming (2 Thess 1:7-8, 2:8). Thus the vocabulary of the Blessed Hope provides no basis whatever for a two-phase distinction of Christ’s Return, since its terms are used interchangeably to describe the same single event. More important still is the fact that each of the three terms is clearly used to describe the *posttribulational* Return of Christ which is viewed as the object of the believer’s hope.

The *parousia*, for example, is indisputably posttribulational in Matthew 24:27, 38, 39 and in 2 Thessalonians 2:8. The same is true of the *apokalypsis* in 2 Thessalonians 1:7 and of *epiphaneia* in 2 Thessalonians 2:8. Therefore, the vocabulary of the Blessed Hope excludes the possibility of a secret Coming of Christ to rapture the Church, followed after seven years of tribulation by a visible, glorious Coming to establish the millennial Jewish Kingdom. The terms used clearly point to a single, indivisible, posttribulational Advent of Christ to bring salvation to believers and retribution to unbelievers.

No Secret Rapture of the Church. A second reason for rejecting a pretribulational secret rapture of the Church is the fact that there is no trace in the New Testament of a secret, invisible, instantaneous rapture of the Church. The most notorious description of the Second Advent, which is found in 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17, suggests the very opposite when it 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*.” “The dead in Christ will rise” and together with the living saints they will be “caught up” (raptured) to meet the Lord in the air.⁶⁵

The “cry,” the “call,” “the trumpet,” and the great gathering of living and resurrected saints hardly suggest a secret, invisible and instantaneous event. On the contrary, as has often been pointed out, this is perhaps the noisiest passage in the Bible. The reference to “a loud trumpet call” and “the trumpet

[which] will sound” in the parallel passages of Matthew 24:31 and 1 Corinthians 15:52 corroborates the visibility and public nature of the Second Advent. No trace of a secret rapture can be found in any of these passages.

No Removal of the Church from the Great Tribulation. A third reason for rejecting the notion of a pretribulation secret rapture of the Church is the fact that such a notion is not supported by the tribulation passages. For example, in His Olivet discourse Jesus speaks of the “great tribulation” that will immediately precede His coming and He promises that “for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened” (Matt 24:21-22, 29). To argue that “the elect” are only Jewish believers and not members of the Church means to ignore that Christ was addressing His apostles who represent not only national Israel but the Church at large. This is confirmed by the fact that both Mark and Luke report the same discourse for the Gentile church (Mark 13; Luke 21).

Noteworthy also is the striking similarity between Christ’s description of the rapture of the Church in Matthew 24:30-31 and that of Paul in 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17. Both passages mention the descent of the Lord, the sounding of the trumpet, the accompanying angels and the gathering of God’s people. Such similarities suggest that both passages describe the same event. Yet in Matthew the rapture of the Church is explicitly placed “after the tribulation” (Matt 24:29) at the time of Christ’s Coming “with power and great glory” (vv. 29-30). The parallelism between the two passages clearly indicates that the rapture of the Church does not precede but, on the contrary, follows the great tribulation.

Protection in the Midst of Tribulation. Christ never promised His Church a pretribulation rapture out of this world. Rather He promised protection in the midst of tribulation. In His petition to His Father He said: “I do not pray that thou shouldst take them out of the world, but that thou shouldst keep them from the evil one” (John 17:15). Similarly to the Church in Philadelphia, Christ promises: “I will keep you from the hour of trial which is coming on the whole world, to try those who dwell upon the earth” (Rev 3:10). If the Church was absent from this earth during the hour of testing, there would be no necessity of divine protection.

No Pretribulation Rapture in Paul. The notion of a secret pretribulation rapture is also negated by Paul’s admonitions in 2 Thessalonians. In the first chapter the Apostle explains that believers will be granted “rest” from the tribulation of this present age “when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance upon those who do not know God . . .” (1:7-8). In other words,

believers will experience deliverance from the sufferings of this age, not through a pretribulational secret rapture but at the posttribulational revelation of Christ.

In the second chapter Paul refutes the misconception prevailing among the Thessalonians that the day of the Lord had come. To refute this misconception he cites two major events that must occur before the Coming of the Lord, namely, the rebellion and the appearance of “the man of lawlessness” (2:3) who will persecute God’s people.

What is crucial in this passage is that Paul makes no mention of a secret pretribulational rapture as a necessary antecedent of the Coming of the Lord. Yet, this would have been the strongest argument Paul could have used to prove to the Thessalonians that the day of the Lord could not possibly have come, since their rapture out of this world had not yet taken place. Paul’s omission of this vital argument strongly suggests that Paul did not believe in a pretribulational rapture of the Church.

This conclusion is also supported by Paul’s mention of the appearance of the antichrist—an indisputably tribulational event which believers will see before the Coming of the Lord. If Paul expected the Church to be raptured away from this world before the tribulation caused by the appearance of the antichrist, he could hardly have taught that believers would see such an event before the Coming of the Lord. What interest would the Thessalonians have in the appearance of the antichrist along with the tribulation accompanying him, if they were to be snatched away from this earth before these events took place? Thus by both his omission and his affirmation, Paul negates the view of a pretribulational rapture of the Church.

No Pretribulational Rapture in Revelation. The book of Revelation treats in fuller detail than any other book of the New Testament the events associated with the great tribulation, such as the sounding of the seven trumpets, the appearance of the beast that inflicts a terrible persecution upon the saints of God, and the pouring out of the seven last plagues (Rev 8 to 16). Though John describes in great detail tribulational events, he never mentions or suggests a pretribulational secret Coming of Christ to rapture the Church away. This is all the more surprising in view of John’s express purpose to instruct the churches regarding final events.

John explicitly mentions a countless multitude of believers who will pass through the great tribulation: “These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb” (Rev 7:14). Pretribulationists argue that these believers are of

only the Jewish race, allegedly because the Church in Revelation 4 to 19 is no longer on earth but in heaven. This reasoning is discredited first of all by the fact that nowhere does John differentiate between Jewish and Gentile tribulation saints.

John explicitly states that the victorious tribulation believers come “from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and tongues” (Rev 7:9). This phrase occurs repeatedly in Revelation to designate not exclusively the Jews but inclusively every member of the human family (Rev 5:9; 10:11; 13:7; 14:6). The Lamb, for example, is praised by the 24 Elders for having ransomed men “from every tribe and tongue and people and nation” (Rev 5:9). Obviously, Christ has ransomed not only Jews but people of every race.

Ecstasy of John, not Rapture of the Church. The argument that the Church in Revelation 4 to 19 is in heaven is based on the faulty assumption that the command to John: “Come up hither, and I will show you what must take place after this” (Rev 4:1), is supposed to refer to the rapture of the Church to heaven. This is an unwarranted interpretation, because the text speaks not of the rapture of the Church, but of John’s ecstatic visionary experience. Even John F. Walvoord, a leading pretribulationist, openly acknowledges that “there is no authority for connecting the rapture with this expression.”⁶⁶

The similarities between the admonitions given in the letters to the seven churches and those given to the tribulation saints suggest that the two are essentially the same people. For example, four times in the seen letters the need for “endurance” is emphasized (Rev 2:2, 3, 19; 3:10), and the same quality is expected of the tribulation saints (Rev 13:10; 14:12). Similarly, the need to “conquer,” expressed seven times in the letters to the churches (Rev 2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21), is the very attribute of the tribulation saints “who had conquered the beast and its image” (Rev 15:2). It hardly seems conceivable that John intended to ascribe the same characteristics to two different groups of people.

Church Suffers Tribulation but not Divine Wrath. In Revelation 22:16 Jesus claims to have sent His angel to John “with this testimony for the churches.” It is difficult to see how the messages given by the angel to John could be a testimony for the churches if the Church is not directly involved in most of the events described in the book (Rev 4 to 19).

The fact of the matter is that the Church in Revelation will suffer persecution by satanic powers during the final tribulation, but she will not suffer divine wrath. The divine wrath, which is portrayed by the seven

apocalyptic plagues, is poured out not indiscriminately upon all, but selectively upon those who “bore the mark of the beast and worshiped its image” (Rev 16:2; cf. 14:9-10).

As the ancient Israelites enjoyed God’s protection during the ten plagues (Ex 11:7), so God’s people will be protected when His divine wrath will fall upon the wicked. This divine protection is represented in Revelation by an angel sealing the servants of God on their foreheads (Rev 7:3) so that they may be spared when God’s wrath falls upon the impenitent (Rev 9:4). Ultimately God’s people will be rescued by the glorious Return of Christ (Rev 16:15; 19:11-21). Thus Revelation portrays not a pretribulation rapture of the Church but a posttribulation Return of Christ.

Conclusion. In light of the reasons discussed above, we conclude that the popular teaching of a secret Coming of Christ to rapture the Church before the final tribulation is a mistaken Advent sign devoid of any Biblical support. The Scripture speaks of Christ’s Second Coming as a single event which occurs after the great tribulation. At that time the dead saints will be resurrected, the living saints will be transformed and all the believers of all the ages will go to be with the Lord.

3. The Rebuilding of the Tribulation Temple

A third popular mistaken Advent sign, closely related to the previous two (restoration of the Jews to Palestine and the rapture), is the alleged rebuilding of the Jerusalem temple during the final tribulation. There are many who believe that the Jerusalem temple, first built by Solomon and later rebuilt by Zerubbabel and remodeled by Herod, will be erected twice again in the future, the first time by the Jews during the seven-year tribulation—thus called “the tribulation temple”—and the second time by Christ when He returns to establish His thousand year reign—thus called “the millennial temple.”

For the purpose of our study, consideration will be given to the alleged building of the tribulation temple, since this is viewed by many dispensational Christians as a most significant prophetic sign of the imminence of Christ’s Return.

The Time of Rebuilding the Temple. The tribulation temple, according to most dispensationalists, must be rebuilt by the middle of the seven-year tribulation. Thomas S. McCall, a leading dispensationalist, articulates this view forcefully: “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.”⁶⁷

This conclusion is drawn from a fanciful interpretation of four main Biblical passages (Dan 9:26-27; Matt 24:15-16; 2 Thess 2:3-4; and Rev 11:1-2). These texts are supposed to teach that a Roman antichrist will arise and make a covenant with Israel for one week (Dan 9:27), that is, for the duration of the seven years of the final tribulation. As a result of this treaty, the erection of the temple and the reinstatement of the sacrificial services will take place.

At midpoint of the tribulation period, the Roman antichrist is supposed to break his covenant with the Jews and go to the temple, claiming to be God, thus accomplishing the abomination of desolation (Dan 9:27; Matt 24:15-16) by disrupting the temple's sacrifices. The rebuilding of the temple is then closely related to the rapture since the latter supposedly marks the beginning of the seven year final tribulation during which time the temple is first rebuilt and then profaned by the antichrist.

Hal Lindsey's Timetable. According to Hal Lindsey's prophetic timetable, the rebuilding of the Jerusalem Temple was to have been completed by the middle of the 1980s, that is, at midpoint of the seven-year countdown which terminates by 1988. The treaty of protection which the Roman antichrist was to make with Israel immediately after the rapture was to enable the Jews to rebuild their Temple in three and one-half years and to reinstate 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."⁶⁸

Rumors of Rebuilding the Temple. The desire, perhaps, to help God out in fulfilling the "prophecy" of rebuilding the tribulation temple may have inspired some to spread rumors that the building material for this project has been secretly prepared in the United States. *Christianity Today* reported in 1967 that "a few years ago reports were widely circulated that a prefabricated temple destined for Jerusalem was seen at a port somewhere in Florida."⁶⁹

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 railcar loads 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."⁷⁰

The entire story has been flatly denied both by the Israeli government and by industry sources in Indiana. To my knowledge, the only fabrication that has begun is not that of the Temple but of stories about it. Such a fanciful

fabrication reflects the unusual interest of some dispensationalists to help God out in fulfilling what they perceive to be an end-time prophecy.

Scriptural “Support” for the Tribulation Temple

Daniel 9:24-27. Scriptural support for the rebuilding of the Jerusalem Temple during the final tribulation is sought in several prophetic passages. The first and foremost of these is the seventy-week prophecy found in Daniel 9:24-27. Dispensationalists dissect the one prophecy contained in this passage into two distinct prophecies.⁷¹ In verse 26 they see the first prophecy predicting the death of the Messiah “after the sixty-ninth week but not in the seventieth,” and the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple in A.D. 70 by the Roman army.

In verse 27 they find a second prophecy predicting the rise of an antichrist more than nineteen centuries after the death of Christ. This antichrist is supposed to be a Roman dictator who will rise out of the European Common Market. He will make a covenant with the Jews “for one week,” that is, for the seven years of the seventieth week.

This covenant is supposed to enable the Jews to rebuild their temple and to reinstitute their ancient sacrificial services. In the midst of this seven-year period (“half of the week”), however, the Roman antichrist will allegedly break the covenant; he “shall cause sacrifice and offering to cease,” and will take “his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God” (2 Thess 2:4). By these acts he will bring about “the abominations” mentioned by Daniel (9:27) and referred to by Christ (“desolating sacrilege”—Matt 24:15-16).

Unwarranted Time-Gap. This intriguing interpretation suffers from three major flaws. First, it breaks the unity of the seventy-week prophecy by introducing a time gap of almost twenty centuries between the sixty-nine weeks and seventieth week. Nowhere does Gabriel imply a gap among the three periods constituting the seventy weeks: seven weeks, sixty-two weeks, and one week. These three time units are presented as a continuous, consecutive and unbreakable unity as indicated by the fact that they are first given in verse 24 as one basic period of “seventy weeks.”

Repetition with Elaboration. The second weakness is the failure to recognize the Hebrew stylistic pattern of “repetition with elaboration” in Daniel 9:24-27.⁷² Recent studies have shown that the verbal correspondence existing between verses 26 and 27 makes the latter verse an elaboration of the former. The pattern of Messiah versus Destroyer found in verse 26 is repeated as Messiah versus Desolator in verse 27. The latter verse, however, adds

significant information. The Messiah who in verse 26 is simply “cut off,” in verse 27 “shall make a strong covenant with many for one week; and for half of the week he shall cause sacrifice and offering to cease.”⁷³ Both of these acts were fulfilled by Christ when He confirmed God’s covenant by instituting the Lord’s Supper (Matt 26:28) and when He brought to an end the validity of the sacrificial system through the rending asunder of the curtain of the temple at the time of His death (Matt 27:51; cf. Heb 10:9).

The desolator, who in verse 26 destroys the city and the temple, comes in verse 27 “upon the wing of abominations” to make “desolate.” By this language is described the complete destruction of the temple by the Roman General Titus in A.D. 70. Thus the Hebrew parallelism between verses 26 and 27 suggests that the Desolator of verse 27 is not an End-time Roman dictator who will arise out of the European Common Market and destroy the tribulation temple, but rather, he is the same Roman General Titus alluded to in verse 26 who did destroy Jerusalem and its temple in A.D. 70. Unfortunately, dispensationalists have divided one prophecy into two, thereby transforming a past Roman Prince who destroyed Jerusalem and its Temple into a future antichrist who is supposed to desecrate and destroy a literal temple that at present does not even exist.

Christ’s Interpretation of Daniel 9:27. The third weakness of the dispensationalist interpretation of Daniel 9:27 is its disregard for Jesus’ application of Daniel’s desolating abomination to His own immediate future. Christ’s prediction regarding “the desolating sacrilege spoken of by the prophet Daniel” (Matt 24:15) is clearly paraphrased by Luke as “Jerusalem surrounded by armies” (Luke 21:20). This paraphrase was made by Luke, as most scholars recognize, because he was writing for Greek readers who would not understand the meaning of the Jewish expression “the desolating sacrilege” used by Christ.

Although Christ’s prediction could have a secondary application to the appearance of an End-time antichrist, its primary reference is clearly to the destruction of Jerusalem by the Roman army. Furthermore, while Christ predicted the destruction of the temple at great length, He never hinted at its rebuilding before or after His Second Advent.

The above considerations suffice to show that the prophecies of Daniel 9:26-27 and Matthew 24:15-16 offer no support whatsoever for the dispensationalist belief in the rebuilding of the tribulation Temple. Besides being devoid of any prophetic support, this belief ignores several theological and practical objections to which we will now briefly allude.

Objections to the Rebuilding of the Jerusalem Temple

Theological Objections. The New Testament has much to say about the new temple. Its actualization, however, is not through an End-time rebuilding of a stone structure in Jerusalem, but through the incarnation, resurrection, and heavenly ministry of Christ. The temple as the symbol of God's presence among His people (Ex 25:8) found its fulfillment through the coming of Christ: "The Word became flesh and tabernacled among us (and we beheld glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father), full of grace and truth" (John 1:14, ASV). It was because Christ saw Himself as the fulfillment of the temple that He could say: "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up" (John 2:19).

The New Temple. The building of the new temple is not an architectural structure on the hill of Zion, but the miracle of an empty tomb. By His death, resurrection, and ascension, Christ became "a minister in the sanctuary and the true tent which is set up not by man but by the Lord" (Heb 8:2).

Christians share in the new temple inaugurated by Christ because they are one with Christ who intercedes for them (Heb 7:25) and dwells with them through His Spirit (1 Cor 3:16). Thus the new temple in the New Testament is not built during the future tribulation upon Mt. 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).

Termination of Temple's Sacrifices. The view of a literal rebuilding of the Jerusalem Temple during the tribulation also contradicts the New Testament teaching regarding the fulfillment and termination of the temple sacrificial system through the sacrifice of Christ on the Cross (Heb 9:11-14; 8:13; 10:9).

The usual dispensational answer to this objection is that the sacrifices of the tribulation and millennial temples "are not expiatory, but merely memorials of the one complete sacrifice of Christ."⁷⁴ But why should a return be made to animal sacrifices to memorialize Christ's death when the Lord has established the Lord's Supper as the memorial of His death and when the Scripture declares them "obsolete" (Heb 8:13)?

Practical Objections. In addition to the theological objections already mentioned, there are several practical obstacles to the rebuilding of the temple. The most serious of these is doubtless the presence of the Moslem Dome of the Rock and the nearby Al-Aksa Mosque, which appear to be situated on the very ancient Temple site. Since for Judaism the ancient site

is the only permissible location for the temple, the Dome of the Rock would have to be removed before any rebuilding of the temple could be considered. Such an action would precipitate an Arab holy war against Israel, besides violating the Israelis' commitment to respect 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 the Messiah has not yet come, Jews are not at liberty to rebuild the Temple.⁷⁵ 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.⁷⁶

CONCLUSION

This chapter has shown how two mistaken principles of prophetic interpretation advocated by dispensationalists, namely, “consistent literalism” and the distinction between Israel and the Church, have contributed to the construction of a sensational but senseless scenario of End-time events. Three of such events have been examined in this chapter, namely, the restoration of the Jews to Palestine, the rapture, and the rebuilding of the Jerusalem Temple. We have found such events to be mistaken and misleading Advent signs, which ultimately weaken rather than strengthen the Advent Hope.

The irresponsible method of using Scripture to construct a fictitious End-time scenario can cause feverish excitement but ultimately it will only lead to sore disappointments. To avoid such disappointments we must base our faith in the imminent Coming of our Lord, not on a *fictitious* End-time scenario, but on the *factual* outworking of God's redemptive activity, manifested in us and in the world around us.

There is no reason to be misled by mistaken Advent signs, when all around us we are witnessing, as shown in chapters 8, 9, 10, an unprecedented fulfillment of the true Advent signs of divine grace, divine judgment, and human rebellion against God. These authentic Advent signs point to the imminent realization of our Advent Hope—a Hope which today can offer comfort to all believers called to live among the uncertainties and troubles of the present world; and motivation to live “lives of holiness and godliness, [while] waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God” (2 Pet 3:11-12).

NOTES TO CHAPTER 11

1. The figures are given by Hal Lindsey himself in his book *The 1980s: Countdown to Armageddon* (Toronto, New York, 1981), pp. 4, 11.

2. Hal Lindsey, *The Late Great Planet Earth* (Grand Rapids, 1970), p. 54. Henceforth referred to as *Planet*.

3. *Planet*, p. 54.

4. In the preface to the book 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” (n. 1), p. 1.

5. *Planet*, pp. 56, 109, 110, 151-152.

6. *Planet*, p. 153.

7. *Planet*, pp. 56, 152-153.

8. *Planet*, pp. 77, 153.

9. Lindsey 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).

10. *Planet*, p. 111.

11. *Planet*, pp. 157-160.

12. *Planet*, p. 162.

13. *Planet*, pp. 175-179.

14. Some of the books by John F. Walvoord are: *Israel in Prophecy* (Grand Rapids, 1962); *The Millennial Kingdom* (Grand Rapids, 1979); *The Rapture Question* (Grand Rapids, 1957); and *The Return of the Lord* (Grand Rapids, 1971).

15. Cornelius Vanderwaal, *Hal Lindsey and Biblical Prophecy* (St. Catherines, Canada, 1978), p. 8.

16. Hal Lindsey (n. 1), p. 4.

17. For a concise treatment of the rise and spread of dispensationalism, see George Eldon Ladd, *The Blessed Hope. A Biblical Study of the Second Advent and the Rapture* (Grand Rapids, 1973), pp. 35-60.

18. The most systematic and apologetic presentation of dispensationalism is given by L. S. Chafer, in *Systematic Theology*, 8 vols. (Dallas: Dallas Seminary Press, 1947).

19. Leon J. Wood, a leading dispensationalist, explicitly states: “The clearest sign of Christ’s return is the modern State of Israel” (*The Bible and Future Events* [Grand Rapids, 1973], p. 18).

20. Herman Hoyt, “Dispensational Premillennialism,” in Robert G. Clouse, ed., *The Meaning of the Millennium* (Downers Grove, Illinois, 1977), p. 66; also L. S. Chafer (n. 18), vol. 4, pp. 259, 288.

21. Charles C. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1965), p. 96.

22. L. S. Chafer (n. 18), vol. 4, p. 288.

23. See, for example, John F. Walvoord, *Israel in Prophecy* (Grand Rapids, 1962), p. 125; Charles Lee Feinberg, “The Rebuilding of the Temple,” in *Prophecy in the Making*, ed. Carl F. H. Henry (Carol Stream, Illinois, 1971), p. 109.

24. J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come* (Grand Rapids, 1964), p. 112.

25. For a most illuminating analysis of the dispensational method of prophetic interpretation, see Hans K. LaRondelle, *The Israel of God in Prophecy* (Berrien Springs, Michigan, 1983).

26. See, for example, J. Dwight Pentecost (n. 24), p. 98; John F. Walvoord, “The Future of Israel,” in *Prophecy in the Making* (n. 23), pp. 327, 341.

27. On the fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant see the perceptive analysis of Louis A. De Cars, *Israel Today: Fulfillment of Prophecy?* (Grand Rapids, 1974), pp. 60-65.

28. R. J. Zwi Werblowski, “Prophecy, the Land and the People,” in *Prophecy in the Making* (n. 23), p. 346.

29. See pp. 53, 34, 317, 261.

30. *Scofield Bible Correspondence Course* as quoted in C. B. Bass, *Backgrounds of Dispensationalism* (Grand Rapids, 1977), p. 150.

31. Emphasis supplied.

32. John F. Walvoord, *Israel in Prophecy* (Grand Rapids, 1962), p. 125.

33. Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Dispensationalism* (Dallas, 1936), p. 107.

34. C. C. Ryrie, *The Basis of the Premillennial Faith* (Neptune, New Jersey, 1966), p. 136.

35. See J. Dwight Pentecost (n. 24), pp. 91, 465. George Eldon Ladd rightly labels this view “a forced interpretation” (*A Theology of the New Testament* [Grand Rapids, 1974], p. 200).

36. Emphasis supplied.

37. F. F. Bruce in *The New Bible Dictionary*, ed. J. D. Douglas (Grand Rapids, 1979), p. 558.

38. See, for example, John F. Walvoord, *The Millennial Kingdom* (Grand Rapids, 1979), p. 170. Charles C. Ryrie writes: “Paul had strongly attacked with Jewish legalists; therefore it would be natural for him to remember with a special blessing those Jews who had forsaken this legalism and followed Christ and the rule of the new creation” (*Dispensationalism Today* [Chicago, 1965], pp. 139-140).

39. Emphasis supplied.

40. Emphasis supplied.

41. Emphasis supplied.

42. Leon J. Wood (n. 19), pp. 18, 22.

43. Hal Lindsey, *A Study Manual to the Late Great Planet Earth*, pp. 11, 13, cited in Dave MacPherson, *The Incredible Cover-up* (Medford, Oregon, 1980), p. 126.

44. *Planet*, p. 54.

45. See Charles C. Ryrie (n. 21), pp. 154-155.

46. Keith M. Bailey, “Israel: Nation of Destiny,” *Christian Life* (November 1967), p. 54; also Richard Wolff, *Israel, Act III, The Bible and the Middle East* (Wheaton, Illinois, 1967), pp. 44-45; James M. Gray, *Prophecy and the Lord’s Return* (New York, 1917), p. 23.

47. Emphasis supplied.

48. J. F. Walvoord in *Prophecy in the Making* (n. 23), p. 338. Also by the same author, *Israel in Prophecy* (Grand Rapids, 1962), p. 66.

49. See the article by W. M. Smith, “The Second Advent of Christ,” *Christianity Today* (December 22, 1967).

50. For a defense of this view see C. F. Baker, *A Dispensational Theology* (Grand Rapids, 1972), p. 606.

51. See above n. 43.

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

53. *Planet*, p. 54.

54. Hal Lindsey (n. 1), p. 11. The whole chapter 4 of *The Late Great Planet Earth* is devoted to this subject.

55. Hal Lindsey (n. 52), pp. 1, 23.

56. The vision is reported in Dave MacPherson, *The Incredible Cover-Up* (Medford, Oregon, 1980), pp. 49-50; also by Hal Lindsey (n. 52), pp. 169-172.

57. *Ibid.*, p. 85.

58. For a brief but informative survey of the development of pretribulationism, see Richard R. Reiter, "A History of the Development of the Rapture Position," *The Rapture. Pre-, Mid-, or Post-Tribulational*, symposium (Grand Rapids, 1984), pp. 24-34.

59. See also Norman F. Douty, *Has Christ's Return Two Stages?* (New York, 1956); Alexander Reese, *The Approaching Advent of Christ* (Grand Rapids, 1975).

60. Dave MacPherson (n. 56), p. 125.

61. John F. Walvoord, *The Rapture Question* (Grand Rapids, 1957), p. 50.

62. C. C. Ryrie (n. 21), p. 159.

63. *Planet*, p. 143.

64. *Ibid.*

65. Emphasis supplied

66. John F. Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Chicago, 1966), p. 103.

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

68. *Planet*, p. 57.

69. "Israel: Things to Come," *Christianity Today* (December 22, 1967), p. 35.

70. *The Christian and Christianity Today* (August 4, 1967), pp. 7-8, cited in *Christianity Today* (n. 69), p. 35.

71. John F. Walvoord, *The Rapture Question* (Grand Rapids, 1957), p. 25.

72. See J. B. Payne, "The Goal of Daniel's Seventy Weeks," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* (June, 1978), p. 109.

73. For an analysis of the inverted parallelism (chiasm) of Daniel 9:24-27, see J. Doukhan, "The Seventy Weeks of Daniel 9: An Exegetical Study," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* (Spring, 1979), pp. 1-22; W. H. Shea, "Poetic Relations of Time Periods in Daniel 9:25," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* (Spring, 1980), pp. 59-63.

74. John F. Walvoord (n. 32), p. 125.

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

76. 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], p. 628).

Chapter 12

THE NEGLECT OF THE ADVENT HOPE

How central is the Advent Hope today to Christian thinking and living? Do Christians today, like the New Testament believers, find the Advent Hope a motivating force to lead “lives of holiness and godliness” while “waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God” (2 Pet 3:11-12)? Unfortunately this is hardly true today. The Advent Hope is vaguely present, if at all, in the consciousness of most Christians. For most Christians, as Hendrikus Berkhof observes, “there is no room for either heaven or hell and even less for somebody who would be descending from heaven to earth on a cloud.”¹

Objective of Chapter. This chapter aims at identifying some of the factors which have contributed to the prevailing neglect of the Advent Hope. An understanding of these factors is a vital first step in the endeavor to revitalize the understanding and the experience of the Advent Hope. The study is divided into two parts. The first considers those humanistic ideologies which have caused the neglect or even abandonment of the Advent Hope. The second examines some of the theological views which unintentionally have devitalized the Advent Hope.

PART ONE

HUMANISTIC AND MATERIALISTIC INFLUENCES

I. The Origin of Humanistic Hope

For its first millennium and a half Western Christendom held to the belief in the future Coming of Christ. The enormous impact of this belief is hard to estimate. An indication is provided by the very term for future, “*avenir*” (French and Spanish), or “*avvenire*” (Italian), which were coined to express the unique Christian concept of a future determined by the *Advent* of Christ.

1. Advent Versus Future

The term “*avenir/avvenire*” has no exact English equivalent. It is generally translated in English as “future,” but there is a noteworthy difference between the meaning of “*future*” (from the Latin “*futurum*”) and the meaning of “*avenir/avvenire*” (from the Latin “*advenire*”). From the latter derives the English noun, “advent,” which means “coming.”

Someone versus Something. The basic difference between the two words consists in the kind of future hoped for. The term “*avenir/avvenire*,” as Emil Brunner explains, “suggests the realization of hope through an event which springs from beyond, from the transcendent.”² On the other hand, the term “*future*” suggests “something which grows out of what already exists.”³ It might help to sharpen the difference by pointing to the fact that while pagans believe in a “*futurum*,” in *something* which might happen in the future, Christians believe in the “*advenire*,” in *Someone* who is to come in the future.

The Christian belief in an “*advenire*,” in a future determined by the “*Advent*” of the Lord Jesus, has been gradually displaced by a humanistic hope in a future social order realized through human resources. Humanists essentially are intellectuals who believe in the human capacity for self-realization. This movement began about five centuries ago with the Renaissance, as a result of a gradual severance from the Christian faith.

This severance in the course of time has influenced many to replace the Advent Hope with a hope in the progress of humanity. The belief in human ability to create a better future is, to use Brunner’s expression, “an illegitimate child of Christianity,”⁴ since it grew out of the Christian faith in a better future to be established by the Coming of the Lord. The difference between the two obviously lies in the means used for achieving a better future, namely, human resources versus divine intervention into human history.

II. The Influence of Humanism

1. Futuristic Theologies

Christian Action. The impact of humanistic thinking can be detected in some contemporary “futuristic” theologies, such as the Theology of Hope, Black Theology, and the Theology of Liberation, which seek the establishment of God’s future Kingdom, not necessarily through a divine inbreaking into human history, but rather through Christian action to improve social conditions and political systems.

To hope and work for a better future society to be realized through human initiatives, though articulated and promoted by the Church, means to invest

human programs for world development with divine potential and quality. It means to hold expectations for a “human future in history which are as remote from the conditions of human existence as they are from the faith of the New Testament.”⁵ It means to hope to establish God’s future Kingdom within this present order.

No Real Hope. Bishop Leslie Newbigin perceptively points out that “if our final hope rests upon a state of society which is to exist on earth at a later date, then those are right who are willing to liquidate living human beings today for the sake of the goal which in any case they will never see. On this view, the men and women living today can only be means to an end, and there is no final judgment upon any human action except the judgment of what is expedient from the point of view of the social process.”⁶

While as Christians we must work for a society in which the Christian values of justice, equality, and freedom more and more flourish, we must never forget that any social and cultural improvement achieved is still defective, influenced by the ambiguities of human power, and thus, cannot be identified with God’s Kingdom.

2. Existential Theologies

A Symbolic Truth. Humanistic influence can also be discerned in the interpretation given to the Second Advent by many liberal theologians. They view the latter, not as a cosmic event that will occur within human history, but rather as a symbol of a timeless truth, or as a supratemporal (beyond history) representation of a final triumph, or “as a gradual spiritual process leavening the present world.”⁷ These interpretations have led to a weakening, if not a total rejection of the Advent Hope.

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—whether conceived naively or in sophisticated terms—is essential to the Christian hope of Christ’s final triumph.”⁸

A Mythical Concept. The Biblical references to a personal, visible Return of Christ are viewed by liberal thinkers as the produce of first-century Jewish apocalyptic and/or of a primitive world view no longer reconcilable with the modern view of the universe.

Rudolf Bultmann, for example, holds that the Christian hope of a future Advent is “incredible not only for the scientist but for every modern man.”⁹ He interprets the Biblical notion of a future Advent as a mythical expression

designed to make eternity real to the existence of the believer here and now. In this case the Advent is not a future realization of present expectations, but a present experience of the future.

This existential interpretation of the Advent Hope ignores the sense of progression and consummation of the Biblical expectation of the Advent. It negates the New Testament view of the Second Advent as a universal revelation of Christ's power and glory and vindication of His redemptive work. It also empties our present life of meaning by depriving us of a perspective of the end and of a motivation to live responsibly in view of His Parousia.

3. Materialistic Ideologies

Technological Achievements. The success of the Western economic system in generating goods and wealth has also contributed to weaken the Christian expectation of the Second Advent. The technological achievements and social prosperity produced by our Western economic systems, have created the false illusion of unlimited human possibilities to establish a new and better social order in which justice, charity, and prosperity will progressively prevail.

Christians are tempted to identify their Advent Hope with the hope offered by present economies and technologies. The tangible and immediate benefits of our expanding economies and technologies can obscure the Christian view of the ultimate and unsurpassed benefits to be experienced at the Coming of the Lord.

Capitalism. The emphasis of capitalism on private enterprise and the legitimate fulfillment of personal ends encourages individualistic success and achievements, often at the expense of genuine concern for the needs of others. The person who is so preoccupied with fulfilling his personal goals—making a profit for himself even if it means exploiting others—can hardly cherish in his heart the hope to see the day when the Lord will come to fulfill not only individual goals, but also those of every believing creature who ever lived.

Communism. Equally negative has been the influence of communism, especially on the working classes of many countries. Its promise of a new and just social system based upon common property and equal distribution of wealth, has led many Christians to embrace such an ideology as their only hope for a better tomorrow. This ideology has influenced Christians not only in Eastern Europe and the Far East, but also in Western countries like Italy, France, and Spain, where there are very strong communist political parties.

The frantic effort to reach immediately the illusive goal of ultimate happiness through economic and political programs is doomed to disappoint-

ment because no human program can triumph over human sinfulness, greed, and the common fate of death. Christ emphasized this truth in the parable of the rich fool who hoped to achieve future security and happiness by heaping up wealth. The Lord rebuked him by confronting him with the brevity of his life: “Fool! This night your soul is required of you” (Luke 12:20). It is only the Advent Hope that gives us reasons to look beyond the portals of the tomb into a future life of happiness and peace.

4. Skeptical Attitudes

Scoffers’ Argument. Humanistic and materialistic views of life have encouraged not only a substitution and neglect of the Advent Hope but also skepticism and scorn toward the belief itself. There are many today who scoff at the belief in a personal, visible Return of Christ to this earth. They point to the fact that throughout the centuries there have been Christians who have proclaimed His imminent Return and yet He has not returned.

This attitude is hardly new. Peter speaks of scoffers who at his time scorned the belief in the Parousia, saying: “Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the father fell asleep, all things have continued as they were from the beginning of creation” (2 Pet 3:4). The Apostle responds to this uniformitarian argument by pointing out several things.

Peter’s Response. First, Peter challenges the motives of these scoffers. Their scorn is the result of “following their own passions” (2 Pet 3:3). Instead of trusting God’s promise, they fell victim to the desires of this world, and thus they were overpowered by the false promise of worldly freedom (2 Pet 2:14, 18-20).

Second, Peter points out that scoffers “deliberately ignore” the fact that their claim about the unchangeableness of history is fictitious because it utterly overlooks past divine intervention into human history as revealed in creation and the Flood (2 Pet 3:5-6). Third, Peter notes that the error of the scoffers lies in measuring God’s redemptive activity by their arbitrary interpretation of history. They ignore the fact that “with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day” (2 Pet 3:8).

This statement is not intended to destroy the *human* concept of time by introducing in its place a *divine* time concept. It merely rejects the scoffers’ pretentious interpretation of history as “slowness” by pointing to the patience of God. “The point is,” as Paul S. Minear underscores, “that while time is real to God, his measurement of time is wholly subservient to his redemptive purpose.”¹⁰

Lastly, Peter responds to the skeptics by explaining that “The Lord is not slow about his promise . . . but is forbearing toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance” (2 Pet 3:9). What many misinterpret as “slowness” in reality is a revelation and manifestation of God’s compassion, of His willingness to provide time and opportunities for repentance and salvation.

Relevance for Today. Peter’s response to the scoffers of his days is relevant to our time. First even today there are skeptics who, being impatient with the “slowness” of Christ’s Advent, choose to interpret history according to the theory of uniformitarianism, which excludes the possibility of an initial divine creation and of an ultimate divine visitation to this world to restore it.

Second, after twenty centuries the problem of the “slowness” of Christ’s Return has become more acute. Peter’s reassurance that human waiting corresponds to divine waiting is significant (“God’s patience waited in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark”—1 Pet 3:20). It tells us that the duration of history reflects God’s patience and forbearance—His willingness to offer ample time and opportunities to repent and be saved.

5. Conclusion

Humanism, by asserting mankind’s capacity for self-realization, has greatly weakened belief in the Advent Hope. It has encouraged social, existential, and materialistic interpretation and/or substitution of the Second Advent, thus fostering skeptical attitudes toward the event itself.

Humanistic influences, however, are not the only negative factors that have devitalized the Advent Hope. A major role has been played also by conflicting theological interpretations about events associated with the Second Coming. To these we now turn our attention.

PART TWO

THEOLOGICAL INFLUENCES

Prevailing conflicting doctrinal views regarding the time, manner, and purpose of the Advent have contributed to confuse the thinking of many believers. The result, as T. A. Kantonen puts it, is that “ordinary Christians either lose interest or turn to soothsayers who use the Bible as a crystal ball to forecast every detail of the world to come.”¹¹

Several doctrinal positions have helped, unintentionally perhaps, to weaken and confuse the Biblical teaching about the Second Advent. A brief

consideration will now be given to some of these doctrinal teachings. It is hoped that this study will help believers to recognize and avoid those misguided teachings which undermine their Advent Hope.

I. The Controversy Over the Millennium

The differing views regarding the 1000 years mentioned in Revelation 20—known as “the millennium”—have not only divided Christians among themselves, but have also made dubious and uncertain the whole doctrine of the Second Advent.

Pre-, Post-, Non-Millennial. Considerable disagreement exists among Christians over the question of whether Christ’s Return will be “pre-,” “post-,” or “non-” millennial.¹² At this point our concern is not to discuss the merits or demerits of each millennial view, but rather to point out how the very debate on whether Christ will return before or after or without a millennium tends to create uncertainty about the Parousia itself.

For some, the conflicting views regarding the relationship between the Parousia and the millennium are indicative of confusion about the doctrine of the Second Advent itself. Moreover, those who place Christ’s Coming after an indefinite but long period of time during which the world eventually is to be Christianized (postmillennialism) or after the conversion of the Jews (amillennialism), can hardly maintain a real sense of imminent expectation of Christ’s Coming.

How can a believer be motivated to be “waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God” (2 Pet 3:11), when he already knows that the waiting time is going to be incredibly long? J. E. Fison recognizes this fact when he observes that the “bringing of the parousia forward to the beginning of the millennium proves to be the generator of hope, which those who keep the parousia till the end of the millennium lack.”¹³ These observations suffice to show that certain millennial views have contributed to a weakening of the Advent Hope.

II. The Debate Over the Rapture

Another theological debate which has devitalized the Advent Hope is that over the relation of the Second Advent to the so-called “rapture” of the church and the great tribulation mentioned in Matthew 24:29-31. The term “rapture” is derived from the Latin verb “rapio” used in 1 Thessalonians 4:17 (Vulgate) and translated in English as “caught up.” Theologically the term describes the translation of the church from this earth to heaven at Christ’s Coming.

Nature of the Debate. The debate centers on the *time* of the rapture of the church. Some believe the rapture will occur before the tribulation and thus are known as *Pretribulationists*. Other Christians believe that the translation of the church will occur in the middle of the tribulation and thus are known as *Midtribulationists*. A large number of Evangelicals believe that the translation of the church will take place after the tribulation and thus they are known as *Posttribulationists*.¹⁴

Negative Impact. Our immediate concern is not to assess these three differing views, but rather to note their negative impact on the doctrine of the Second Advent. The person who becomes all wrapped up in figuring out how and when the rapture, the tribulation, and the resurrection will occur may be more interested in satisfying the human desire to know the mysteries of the future than in rejoicing over the certainty of meeting the Lord. The purpose of the Advent prophecies is not, as noted earlier, to satisfy human curiosity to know the exact sequence of events leading to and following Christ's Return, but to nourish faith in the promise of Christ's Return.

Fact and Purpose. It is noteworthy that Paul, in his references to the translation of the church, emphasizes not its *time* and *place* but its *fact* and *purpose*. The *fact* is that living believers at the Coming of Christ will be transformed and caught up to meet the Lord in the air (1 Thess 4:17). There is no reference or inference here to a rapture to take place before or after the tribulation.

The *purpose* is "to meet the Lord in the air; and so we shall always be with the Lord" (1 Thess 4:17). The emphasis is not on the place of the meeting or on what will happen after the meeting, but rather on the fact of the union with the Lord, which will last forever. No indication is given on whether this reunion with the Lord will continue in the air, on earth, or in heaven. To attempt to extrapolate from the Scripture gratuitous conclusions can only result in a weakening of the Advent Hope.

Blessed Hope only for Some. The teaching that the Lord will secretly rapture and take to heaven the resurrected and transformed believers before the tribulation, while leaving those still unconverted on this earth to go through seven years of great tribulation, raises questions regarding the fairness, finality, and function of the Lord's Coming. If the rapture is the Blessed Hope, as maintained by pretribulationists, then those who have to go through the great tribulation have no Blessed Hope to sustain them.

Why should Christ come first secretly and then publicly, first for some and then for others, first halfway down and then all the way down to the earth?

Does not this artificial duplication of Christ's coming, with a seven-year interval in between, expose the Advent Hope to unnecessary ridicule? It is regrettable that the Advent Hope suffers not only from the direct attacks of liberals who reject its literal future fulfillment, but also from the indirect efforts of conservative writers who accept and expect its fulfillment.

III. Arbitrary Interpretation of Prophecies

1. Date Setting

The morbid and sometimes even comic fanaticism of those who have concentrated on setting dates for Christ's Return and forecasting the events leading to the End has frequently exposed the Advent Hope to ridicule and criticism. From the Montanists in the second century to some dispensationalists like Hal Lindsey in the twentieth century, there have been Christians who have predicted the time and events leading to Christ's Return. When their predictions passed unfulfilled, critics have laughed both at their cause and at their teaching.

It is well known that William Miller set the date of Christ's Return for October 22, 1844. "Although the 'Millerites'," notes Timothy P. Weber, "probably did not gather on roofs and hilltops in white 'ascension' robes to wait for the Lord to appear, as their enemies alleged, they became the laughingstocks of American evangelicalism when Christ failed to appear."¹⁵

2. Current Events

Hal Lindsey's Scenario. The same scoffing attitude is encouraged by the arbitrary application of Biblical prophecies to current events. For example, Hal Lindsey, in his popular book *The Late Great Planet Earth*, predicted in 1970 that Russia, the prophetic king of the North, would soon plot with Egypt, the king of the South, against the State of Israel. This confrontation, he claims, will provoke the counterattack of the Common Market, the prophetic Antichrist, and China, the kings of the East, would join in the conflict, thus bringing about the battle of Armageddon and the victorious Return of Christ.

A scenario such as this was in tune with the events of the early 1970s when Russia still exerted considerable influence in Egyptian affairs and when tension existed between Egypt and Israel in the aftermath of the 1967 war. Today, however, Lindsey's scenario is unrealistic since Egypt and Israel have established diplomatic and economic relations and Russian diplomats and advisers have been expelled from Egypt.¹⁶

Perhaps if Lindsey were to rewrite the book today he might make Libya the prophetic king of the South on account of its present ties with Moscow. This kind of arbitrary interpretation of prophecies can only aid the cause of the 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.

3. Spying Out the Future

Excessive preoccupation with the interpretation of the Advent signs in order to spy out the future and to figure out a chronological timetable of last-day events can affect adversely both Christian faith and practice. When signs are sought so that “we may see, and believe” (John 6:30), such a search for signs competes with faith, because faith is “the conviction of things not seen” (Heb 11:1). This is why on some occasions Christ denied the request for signs, saying: “Truly, I say to you, no sign shall be given to this generation” (Mark 8:12).

At the same time Christ urged His disciples to watch for the signs of the approaching kingdom (Luke 21:28, 29; Mark 13: 28, 29). The apparent contradiction is resolved by recognizing that faith and sight must be kept in balance. Sight is not supposed to displace faith but to nourish it. Excessive concern for signs upsets the balance by making sight more important than faith.

Personal Savior, not Impersonal Events. To base the conviction of the imminence of the Advent on the datable world of events, rather than on the undatable world of love, means to be waiting not for a personal Savior but for impersonal events such as the rapture, the judgment, and the millennium.

Waiting for events such as the rapture can cause feverish excitement. On the other hand, waiting for a final judgment can generate fear, hostility, or even indifference. Few Christians are excited at the thought of the Coming of Christ “to judge the living and the dead.” All of these attitudes (excitement, fear, and indifference) tend to obscure the reality and value of the Advent Hope.

4. Concern for Self-Survival

The people who claim to see and to know how the final events are going to unfold generally view this present order as so hopeless that they regard any effort to improve social conditions as futile. Often their concern to “control” the future is related to their inability to cope with the present. The concern of these sign-seekers is for the survival of themselves and their own in-group. The calamities and suffering affecting the rest of mankind (the outsiders) are treated as welcome fulfillment of God’s promises.

This lack of a social conscience is interpreted by critics as the outcome of the professed belief in the near Second Advent. Some premillennialists,

comments Timothy P. Weber, hold such a hopeless view of the present order as to leave “little room for God or for themselves to work in it.”¹⁷ In the final analysis, then, fanaticism regarding the expectation of the Second Advent undermines the proclamation and the experience of the Advent Hope, exposing it to the ridicule of unbelievers.

IV. Living Presence

While fanatical sects have weakened the Advent Hope by concentrating on such peripheral factors as dates, contemporary event and hypothetical future political developments, other Christians have devitalized the Advent Hope by emphasizing the present experience of Christ’s presence and individual immortality at the expense of a future cosmic redemption.

1. Present Experience of Salvation

This emphasis is present in both Catholic and Protestant theological traditions. A look at their standard theological treatises indicates that little attention is given to the study of eschatology in general and of the Second Advent in particular. In these traditions the center of Christianity is to be found in the present experience of salvation and in the individual immortality of the soul. Unfortunately these theological traditions fail to contextualize the present salvation in the final and cosmic restoration of all things to be accomplished by Christ at His Return.

Realized Eschatology. This theological trend is reflected in the school of interpretation known as “realized eschatology,” which maintains that Christ realized His kingdom when He inaugurated His public ministry. His resurrection meant that all had been fulfilled. There is, therefore, no literal future Return of Christ, since the End has already come. C. H. Dodd, a chief exponent of this school, writes: “All that the church hoped for in the second coming of Christ is already given in its present experience of Christ through the Spirit.”¹⁸

2. The Tension Between the Present and the Future

To emphasize the presence of Christ through the Holy Spirit while ignoring His future Parousia means to fail to recognize and experience the tension which exists in the Christian Hope between the “already” and the “not yet.” John expresses this tension by the formula “the hour is coming, and now is” (John 5:25). The early Christians, as noted in Chapter 3, expressed and experienced through the ministry of the Holy Spirit a profound sense of unity between the present experience of Christ’s presence and the future consummation of salvation at Christ’s Coming.

No Forward Look. To believe that in Christ we already have *now* all that we need means to cut the nerve of the Christian hope (1 Cor 13:13), a virtue in short supply in today's Christian world. It means, as poignantly stated by Paul, to be "of all men most to be pitied" (1 Cor 15:19). It means, as eloquently expressed by J. E. Fison, that "the hope of the wonder that lies ahead for the church and for the world as well as for the individual soul is lost, either in a vague or unfounded optimism about better things to come for the world as a whole and for the redeemed community within it, or else in some highly individualized conception of the beatific vision."¹⁹

3. The Future Determines the Present

One wonders if it is really possible to believe in the present presence of Christ while denying a future visible reunion with the Lord on the day of His Parousia. Is not the present experience of Christ's invisible presence nourished by the hope of a future visible encounter with the Lord? Shakespeare's words "journeys end in lovers meeting" applies not only to romantic love but also to the essence of the Christian Hope.

Meeting with Christ. The focus of the Christian hope is meeting the Lord face to face on the day of His glorious appearing (Titus 2:13). "Beloved," writes John, "we are God's children now; it does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is" (1 John 3:2). This climactic meeting with Christ will mark the end of lovers' journey, and the beginning of a new and more intimate relationship with the Lord and fellow-believers.

To deny the reality of this final meeting with the Lord means to be pilgrims journeying on a road leading nowhere. As Emil Brunner eloquently puts it: "Faith in Jesus without the expectation of his Parousia is a cheque that is never cashed, a promise that is not made in earnest. A faith in Christ without the expectation of a Parousia is like a flight of stairs that leads nowhere, but ends in the void."²⁰ To make the present rather than the future the culmination and consummation of redemption means that this temporal order will never see the vindication of God. Thus His creative and redemptive acts would have been a failure.²¹

V. Individual Immortality

1. No Real Advent Hope

The belief in the immediate transit after death of individual souls to a state of perfect blessedness (*heaven*) or to a state of continuous punishment (*hell*) or to an intermediate state of purification (*purgatory*) has greatly weakened the expectation of Christ's Coming. The belief in the survival of

the individual soul apart from the body after death is held not only by the Roman Catholic Church but also by several Evangelical Churches and liberal theologians who may not wish to be identified with a specific denomination.

Immediate Paradise. It is not difficult to see how the belief in the survival of the soul can obscure and eclipse the expectation of the Second Advent. If at death the soul of the believer goes immediately to the Lord and thus, is able to enjoy perfect blessedness, communion with God, peace, and rest, there can hardly be any real sense of expectation for the Coming of the Lord to resurrect the sleeping saints.²² At best, the Parousia may be regarded as an intensification of heavenly bliss by granting a material body to disembodied souls already in heaven.

Concern Over Purgatory. The concern over the purifying punishments of purgatory can induce living believers to worry and to work on behalf of their deceased loved ones, helping them to transit quickly from the torment of purgatory to the bliss of paradise. Such a concern detracts from personal preparation for the Advent.

The temporal punishment of purgatory can obscure the significance and necessity of a last judgment at Christ's Coming. Rather than "waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God" (2 Pet 3:12), believers are encouraged to work for and earnestly pray for the speedy transition of their loved ones from the suffering of purgatory to the blessedness of paradise.

2. Individual Survival

These teachings, besides being foreign to the Scripture, encourage Christians to strive for individual and immediate blessedness after death and, consequently, they push into the background the hope for a universal, cosmic, and corporate redemption to be realized at and through the Coming of the Lord. The ultimate result of this belief is, as noted by Abraham Kuyper, that "by far the majority of Christians do not think much beyond their own death."²³

Immediate Paradise. The primary concern of those who believe in the survival of their souls after death is to reach paradise immediately, though in a disembodied, psychological form. This concern leaves barely any time or interest for the Coming of the Lord and the resurrection of the body.

This individualistic hope for immediate immortality overrides the Biblical corporate hope for an ultimate restoration of this creation and its creatures (Rom 8:19-23; 1 Cor 15:24-28). When the only future that really counts is the individual survival after death, the anguish and mankind can

have only a peripheral interest and the value of God's redemption for this whole world is largely ignored.

3. Greek Philosophy

The concept of a disembodied, psychological survival after death is rooted not in Biblical thought but in Greek philosophy, particularly that of Plato. For the Greeks, the resurrection of the body was unthinkable because the body, being matter, was of lower value than the soul and, consequently, was not worthy of survival. In Biblical thought, however, the body is not a tomb for the soul, but a temple for God's Spirit and thus worthy of creation and resurrection.

"From the Greek concept of death," writes Oscar Cullmann, "one could come only to the doctrine of the 'immortality of the soul.' Resurrection faith, on the contrary, is only possible on Biblical ground, where . . . death and continued life after death do not constitute an organic natural process; rather, mighty powers stand here in conflict. When in the Bible life comes out of death, a miracle is necessary . . . The resurrection hope presupposes the faith in creation. Because God is the creator also of the body, therefore, in the Bible 'resurrection,' in opposition to Hellenism, must be the resurrection of the body."²⁴

4. Going Up or Coming Down?

To believe in the immortality of the soul means to believe that at least part of oneself is immortal in the sense of being incapable of passing out of existence. Such a belief encourages confidence in oneself and in the possibility of one's soul going up to the Lord. On the other hand, to believe in the resurrection of the body means to believe not in ourselves or in our disembodied souls going to the Lord, but rather in Christ who will come to raise the dead and transform the living. This means to believe in the *coming down* of the Lord to this earth to meet embodied believers instead of believing in the *going up* of disembodied souls to heaven to meet the Lord.

The Parousia stresses a final consummation realized by a movement of Christ's *coming down* to mankind rather than individual souls *going up* to Him. The Advent Hope is not "a pie in the sky when you die" but a real meeting upon this earth between embodied believers and the embodied Christ on the glorious day of His Parousia. Out of that real meeting will come a transformation affecting humanity and nature. This great expectation is obscured and erased by the belief in individual immortality and heavenly bliss immediately after death.

VI. The Church and Its Worship

1. Sacramental View of the Church

The over-evaluation of the church as a *visible* divine institution in which the presence of Christ is manifested concretely in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper must be regarded as another factor which has diverted the attention of many believers from a future expectation of Christ's Coming. If Christ already inhabits the church, then everything is fulfilled within the church and little effective room is left for the expectation of the Parousia.

Deification of the Church. Edward Schillebeeckx, an articulate Catholic theologian, exemplifies this absolutizing of the church. When explaining the Constitution On the Church of the Second Vatican Council, he writes: "The church is nothing other and nothing less than the revelation or epiphany of and the completion of God's plan of salvation in the world and in the history of the world in which God, through the church, visibly completes the history of salvation."²⁵

This "sacramental" view of the church, characteristic not only of Catholicism but also of Anglicanism, leads at times, as J. E. Fison rightly notes, "to a virtual deification of the church and to a transubstantiation of its earthly realities into realities of grace. For such an outlook, lip-service to a traditional future eschatology may be genuine in so far as individual hopes of immortality are concerned, but it can hardly have any meaning in the biblical sense for any corporate hope either for the world or for the church."²⁶

2. The Future Anticipated in the Present

Oscar Cullmann points out that "what Primitive Christianity says of the future is in large part transferred into the present" by Catholicism.²⁷ He alludes to the Catholic interpretation of the thousand-year kingdom (Rev 20:4) as being the age of the Church. Such a view has contributed to the fading away of the Parousia expectation. Cullmann finds an example of this development in the "decision of the Congregation of the Holy Office [July 29, 1944], according to which faith in the visible return of Christ no longer is regarded as obligatory (it can 'not be taught as certain')."²⁸

Need for Proper Balance. Our concern here is not to criticize the Roman Catholic view of the Advent Hope, but rather to stress the need to maintain a proper balance between the present, spiritual, and invisible presence of Christ and His future, physical, visible, and glorious manifestation at the Parousia. Christ has promised to be present in our hearts through the Holy Spirit to the end of the age (John 16:7, 13, 14; Matt 28:20), but to

grasp the reality and meaning of His present presence we must never forget that He is not yet here.

It is at His Coming in glory that the full reality of Christ's presence will be understood and experienced. John expresses this truth eloquently when he writes: "Beloved, we are God's children now; it does not yet appear that we shall be, but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is" (1 John 3:2; cf. Col 3:4). Any attempt to transfer this new reality (to be witnessed and experienced at the Parousia) to the present dispensation of the church can only result in a gradual abandonment of the Advent Hope.

VII. The False Security of a Distant Advent

1. The "Distant Future" Philosophy

The Advent Hope is weakened not only by misplaced or erroneous theological views, but also by a false sense of security based on a distant view of Christ's Return. There are many today who believe in a literal return of Christ, but they project it into a far-distant and almost irrelevant future, thus lapsing into a false sense of security and carelessness. Like the unwise steward, they say in their hearts, "My master is delayed in coming" (Luke 12:45). Thinking that Christ's Return still lies somewhere in the distant future, they live under two wrong assumptions.

First, they think that they can do what they wish while the Master is away. We tend to compartmentalize life into secular and sacred activities. The secular concerns predominate when we view the Lord as distant and the sacred interests prevail when we sense that the Lord is near. The consciousness of the nearness of Christ's presence and coming challenges us "to live sober, upright, and godly lives in this world" (Titus 2:12).

2. The "Plenty of Time" Philosophy

The second false assumption is that there is plenty of time to make things right before Christ comes. This assumption is fatal because tomorrow will not make it easier to right today's wrong. Moreover, the person who relies on the time factor reveals fear rather than love of the Coming of the Lord.

To expect to change one's lifestyle at the eve of Christ's Return, out of fear of consequences, means to view His Parousia as an event which disrupts rather than fulfills one's goals and aspirations. Ultimately, such a view indicates that a person has yet to experience the joy of salvation and of communion with the Lord. To live under the false sense of security of a distant Parousia means to reduce the Advent Hope into a lifeless doctrine and a sterile creed.

VIII. Misconceptions of the New World

The popular concept of paradise as a spiritual retreat center somewhere up in space, where souls sing and pray everlastingly, has contributed to dampen the expectation of Christ's Return. If the new world Christ will establish at His Coming is a place beautiful but unreal, a place where the solid joys of this present life must be exchanged for a vague and ethereal existence of adoration and contemplation, then it is not surprising that some dread the thought of Christ's Return. To them the Advent means the end of their hopes for the thrills and excitements they feel this present life has to offer.

1. Ethereal Paradise

In his essay on "Paradise," the poet Laurie Lee notes how unsatisfying to modern minds are the traditional images of paradise: "Too chaste, too disinfected, too much on its best behavior, it received little more than a dutiful nod from the faithful. Hell, on the other hand, was always a good crown-raiser, having ninety per cent of the action—high colors, high temperatures, intricate devilties and always the most interesting company available."²⁹

Twentieth-century Christians in love with the sights and sounds of the great metropolis can hardly be expected to get excited by the vision of a Saviour soon to come to establish a spiritual world where monastic peace and stillness will prevail throughout eternity; where "in mansions of glory and endless delight/I'll ever adore thee in heaven so bright."

This vision of a vague, ethereal paradise has been inspired more by Greek philosophy than by Biblical teachings. For the Greeks, we already noted, the material components of this world were evil and consequently not worthy of survival. The aim was to reach the spiritual realm where souls liberated from the prison-house of a material body enjoy eternal bliss. Both the Old and New Testaments reject this dualism between the material and the spiritual.

2. Biblical Realism

Old Testament. In the Old Testament the final salvation inaugurated by the Coming of the Lord is not an *escape from* but a *transformation of* this world. The "new heavens and a new earth" (Is 65:17) are not a remote and inconsequential world somewhere off in space; rather they are the present heaven and earth renewed to their original perfection. "The wilderness becomes a fruitful field" (Is 32:15) and "the wolf shall dwell with the lamb" (Is 11:6).

The Old Testament opens with the sevenfold proclamation that God's original creation was "very good." The seventh day was divinely established

as a memorial to the perfection and goodness of God's creation. This vision of the peace, harmony, material prosperity, and delight of the primordial Sabbath—Adam's *First Day* after his creation—functions in Old Testament times as the paradigm of the *Last Days*, a common designation for the world to come.

New Testament. The New Testament vision of God's new world is basically the same as that of the Old Testament. The New Testament authors do not speak of an ethereal heaven where glorified souls will spend eternity wearing white robes, singing, plucking harps, praying, chasing clouds, and drinking milk of ambrosia, but rather they speak of this planet being purified, transformed, and perfected at and through the Coming of the Lord (2 Pet 3:11-13; Rom 8:19-25; Rev 21:1).

Paul speaks in Romans 8 about this present human and subhuman creation which eagerly longs to be liberated "from its bondage to decay" (Rom 8:19-23). As in the Old Testament, this new world into which we enter at the Coming of the Lord is not another world, but it is this earth and this heaven, restored to their original perfection (Rev 21:1-4).

Real World. Believers enter into the new earth, not as disembodied souls, but as resurrected bodily persons (Rev 20:4; John 4:28-29; 1 Thess 4:14-17). Though nothing unclean shall enter the New Jerusalem, we are told that "the kings of the earth shall bring their glory into it, . . . they shall bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations" (Rev 21:24, 26). These verses suggest that everything of real worth in the old heaven and earth, including the achievements of man's inventive artistic, and intellectual prowess, will find a place in the eternal order. The very image of "the city" conveys the idea of activity, vitality, creativity, and real relationships.

It is regrettable that this fundamentally earthly view of God's new world portrayed in the Scripture has largely been lost and replaced in popular piety with an ethereal, spiritualized concept of heaven. The latter has made well-meaning persons indifferent if not resentful toward the Second Advent, since they mistakenly view such an event as the end of their real life on this earth.

CONCLUSION

This brief survey has indicated that several factors have contributed to foster the prevailing indifference and neglect of the Advent Hope.

Humanism substituted the belief in a future determined by the Advent of Christ with the belief in a future realized through human resources. This

humanistic thinking has influenced liberal theologians who interpret the Second Advent as Christian action to improve social conditions and/or as a present, existential experience of the future.

Materialistic ideologies have tempted Christians to seek for Christ's Kingdom in the hope offered by present economies and technologies. The result of these ideologies has been an attitude of skepticism and scorn by many people toward a literal, personal Second Advent.

Differing and conflicting theological views regarding the millennium, the rapture, the meaning of the Advent signs, unconditional individual immortality, the nature of the church and its worship, and the notion of a delay of the Advent have all in their own way contributed to devitalize the Advent Hope. Liberal Christians have caused the Advent Hope to wither and disappear by treating as obsolete those scriptural references to a physical Return of Christ and by substituting in its place a present experience of Christ's present and a Christian social involvement for a better tomorrow.

Conservative Christians have weakened the Advent Hope through their efforts to formulate exact timetables and/or order of event leading to and following the Parousia. Such a concern often reveals more the impatience of a self-righteous elite, eager to be exalted above all other people, than a genuine desire to see the consummation of redemption, the vindication of God's justice, and the realization of an everlasting communion with the Lord and with fellow believers of all races, nations, and languages.

The manifold ways in which the Advent Hope has suffered on the part of both friends and foes are indicative of the tremendous importance of this truth. To the extent that the "Blessed Hope" is neglected or ignored or denied or scorned, to that extent the Christian life is deprived of present motivation and of future assurance.

If the present experience of Christ's saving grace is not to be followed by a future, final, and decisive victory of Christ over the evil of this present world, then God's experiment with human rebellion has been a failure and "we are of all men most to be pitied" (1 Cor 15:19). The prevailing neglect or denial of the Advent Hope should serve, not to discourage us, but to deepen our commitment to study, to pray, to work, and to wait expectantly for the imminent Return of our Lord, Jesus Christ.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 12

1. Hendrikus Berkhof, *Well-founded Hope* (Richmond, Virginia, 1969), p. 85.
2. Emil Brunner, *Eternal Hope* (London, 1954), p. 25.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 25.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 25.
5. John C. Bennett, "A Theological Conception of Goals for Economic Life," in *Goals of Economic Life*, ed. A. Dudley Ward (New York, 1972), p. 416.
6. J. E. L. Newbigin, *Mission Under the Cross* (London, 1953), p. 111.
7. T. A. Kantonen, *The Christian Hope* (Philadelphia, 1954), p. 73. The author offers a concise review of the various existential interpretations of the Second Advent. Also A. L. Moore, *The Parousia in the New Testament* (Leiden, 1966), pp. 1-2.
8. Georgia Harkness, "Progress in Eschatology," *Christian Century* (January 14, 1953), p. 45.
9. Rudolf Karl Bultmann, "NT and Mythology," in *Kerygma and Myth*, ed. Hans. Werner Bartsch (London, 1961), vol. 1, p. 38.
10. Paul S. Minear, *Christian Hope and the Second Coming* (Philadelphia, 1954), p. 206.
11. T. A. Kantonen (n. 7), p. 73.
12. For a concise presentation of the major views on the millennium see the symposium edited by Robert G. Clouse, *The Meaning of the Millennium* (Downers Grove, Illinois, 1977); also Anthony A. Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future* (Grand Rapids, 1979), pp. 173-193.
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14. For a most concise and well articulated presentation of the various views on the rapture, see the symposium by Gleason L. Archer, Paul D. Feinberg, Douglas J. Moo, and Richard R. Reiter, *The Rapture: Pre-, Mid-, or Post-Tribulational?* (Grand Rapids, 1984).
15. Timothy P. Weber, *Living in the Shadow of the Second Coming* (Oxford University Press, 1979), p. 15.

16. For an analysis of Hal Lindsey's sensational but senseless End-time scenario see Samuele Bacchiocchi, *Hal Lindsey's Prophetic Jigsaw Puzzle: Five Predictions that Failed!* (Berrien Springs, Michigan, 1985).

17. Timothy B. Weber (n. 15), p. 183.

18. C. H. Dodd, *The Apostolic Preaching and Its Development* (London, 1936), p. 174.

19. J. E. Fison (n. 13), p. 63.

20. Emil Brunner (n. 2), p. 12.

21. Max Warren keenly notes that "if the temporal order cannot see the Vindication of God, then his experiment with time has been a failure" (*The Truth of Vision* [London, 1948], p. 135).

22. There seems to be a tendency among some Catholic theologians to reject the traditional notion of the soul as a separate entity from the body. See Michael Simpson, *The Theology of Death and Eternal Life* (Hales Corners, Wisconsin, 1971), p. 64.

23. Cited in G. C. Berkouwer, *The Return of Christ* (Grand Rapids, 1972), p. 34. The same view is presented by Russell Foster Aldwinckle, *Death in the Secular City* (London, 1972), p. 82.

24. Oscar Cullman, *Christ and Time* (Philadelphia, 1964), p. 234.

25. Edward Schillebeeck, *The Mission of the Church* (New York, 1973), p. 45.

26. J. E. Fison (n. 13), p. 65.

27. Oscar Cullmann (n. 24), p. 147.

28. *Ibid.* See also A. L. Moore, *The Parousia in the New Testament* (Leiden, 1966), p. 64.

29. Cited in Stephen Travis, *I Believe in the Second Coming of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, 1982), p. 176.

Chapter 13

THE JUDGMENT AND THE ADVENT HOPE

Michelangelo's fresco "The Last Judgment," which is found in the Sistine Chapel in Rome, portrays dramatically the historical and popular view of the final judgment. Christ comes as vengeful Judge with the right arm upraised, fulminating punishment to the Damned while the Blessed are floating upward toward heavenly bliss. The Saved draw close to Christ with fear and trepidation.

Such a frightening picture of a vindictive Last Judgment ignores not only the joy and celebration of the Second Advent but also the dynamics of the final judgment. The final judgment spells not only gloom and vengeance for the unsaved but also gladness and victory for the saved. Christ comes as a triumphant Judge not merely to punish unbelievers, but especially to reward believers with the gift of eternal life.

Objective of Chapter. The next two chapters aim to define the Biblical teaching regarding the final judgment and its relationship to the Second Advent. A correct understanding of the dynamics of the final judgment can enhance our Advent Hope and strengthen our trust in the fairness of God's dealing with this world.

The task of briefly defining the Biblical teaching regarding the final judgment is not easy, because the Scripture has a great deal to say about this subject. For the sake of brevity and clarity this chapter will examine the following four vital aspects of the final judgment:

1. The Necessity of the Final Judgment
2. The Scope of the Final Judgment
3. The Standard of the Final Judgment
4. The Nature of the Advent Judgment

PART ONE

THE NECESSITY OF THE FINAL JUDGMENT

1. The Denial of the Necessity of the Final Judgment

A Present Experience. Many today have difficulty accepting the idea of a divine final judgment for all mankind. They are troubled by the concept of God as a Judge and by the mechanics of a final judgment. Well-known theologians such as Karl Barth, Oscar Cullman, Reinhold Niebuhr, C. H. Dodd, and Rudolf Bultmann hardly mention the *final* judgment, emphasizing instead the idea of a *present* judgment. The final judgment is viewed not as a dramatic and climactic cosmic event, but as a present decision for or against Christ which results in the divine justification or condemnation of individuals.¹

It is true that in one sense human beings judge themselves here and now by their response for or against Christ. As shown in chapter 10, the Scripture does teach that God brings His judgments upon human wickedness in this present life. But any divine judgment experienced in this present life *is not final*. It is designed, as we have seen, to call people to repentance. But the last judgment *is final* and irreversible. There is no higher court of appeal possible.

The Scripture emphatically teaches that God “has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness” by Jesus Christ (Acts 17:31; cf. Rom 14:10, 2 Cor 5:10). The Christian hope is rooted not only in Christ’s past atoning death for sin, but also in His future Return “to judge the living and the dead” (2 Tim 4:1). To ignore or deny the final judgment means to cut the nerve of the Christian Hope, which is to see the final, decisive triumph of God over evil; it means, as Paul puts it, to be “of all men most to be pitied” (1 Cor 15:19).

Human Destiny Determined at Death. Another reason why some reject the necessity of the final judgment is that they believe each person’s destiny is already determined at the time of his or her death. As cogently stated by T. Francis Glasson, “If men know their fate after death, what is the purpose of the final collective judgment, which can produce no trepidation or uncertainty since everything is already fixed?”²

The logic of this reasoning seems pervasive but unfortunately it rests on a dualistic, platonic understanding of human nature which is foreign to the Scriptures. Nowhere does the Bible teach two phases of rewards and punishments, the first at death for the soul and the second at Christ’s Coming for the body and soul. The resurrection to life or the resurrection to condemnation (John 5:29) will be experienced by the whole person, not merely by a part of it.

No Need of Investigative Judgment. Others reject the necessity of a final judgment because they believe that it is based on the wrong assumption that the final judgment enables God to determine what the final destiny of each individual should be. Some wrongly attribute this view to Seventh-day Adventists. Anthony A. Hoekema writes: “Seventh-day Adventists, for example, teach that at the end of every person’s life there will be an ‘investigative judgment’ to determine whether he will be saved or lost.”³

This statement is an obvious misunderstanding and misrepresentation of Adventist teaching, which may have been suggested by unguarded statements in past Adventist literature. The purpose of the “investigative” or pre-Advent judgment, for Seventh-day Adventists, is certainly not to enable God to determine what destiny each person is to receive, but rather to reveal to heavenly intelligences the fairness of God’s justice and mercy.

Article 23 of the “Fundamental Beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists” clearly states: “The investigative judgment reveals to heavenly intelligences who among the dead are asleep in Christ and therefore, in Him, are deemed worthy to have part in the first resurrection . . . This judgment vindicates the justice of God in saving those who believe in Jesus.”⁴

2. The Necessity of the Final Judgment

A Self-Evident Truth. The Scripture does not argue for the necessity of a final judgment, it simply acknowledges its reality as an axiomatic, self-evident truth. The only way into the world to come is not through a gradual evolution but through a final judgment manifested by the Coming of Christ. The reality of the final judgment is as inescapable as death: “it is appointed for men to die once, and after that comes judgment” (Heb 9:27).

Paul asks rhetorically: “Do you suppose, O man, that . . . you will escape the judgment of God?” (Rom 2:3). The answer is never in doubt. The final judgment is such a self-evident and fundamental reality that it makes any present judgment of the conduct of fellow-believers inappropriate (Rom 14:10) and any judgment of a “human court” passed upon believers of relative value (1 Cor 4:3-4).

One of the strongest proofs for the necessity of the final judgment is God’s judgment and wrath fallen on Christ (2 Cor 5:21; 1 John 4:10). If Christ bore such a heavy judgment for our sins, “how shall we escape [the final judgment] if we neglect such a great salvation?” (Heb 2:3). It is the incredible revelation of God’s saving love through Jesus Christ that demands the severity of the final judgment upon those who reject God’s gift of redeeming love. If God is a moral God, He cannot ignore the most heinous of all sins which

is the sin against love. Against such a sin “God’s righteous judgment will be revealed” in the final judgment (Rom 2:5).

A Requirement of God’s Moral Nature. The necessity of a final judgment rests on the moral nature of God and on the moral order of His creation. Only by abrogating His moral nature and the moral order of His universe could God dispense with the final judgment. If God is a moral, just God, He must judge in a final, decisive way the moral conduct of all His rational creatures. God’s justice and mercy need a final outward judgment for their revelation and vindication. It is only the final judgment that will bring the conflict between good and evil to an end by disposing of evil in a decisive and permanent way.

A Requirement of Human Freedom. The necessity of a final judgment is also determined by our human freedom and responsibility. Human beings are not programmed by God to act automatically. God fully respects our human freedom. To be free to choose means to be ultimately responsible for one’s decision and destiny. Judgment is the consequence of God’s respect for our choices. The eternal consequences of our choices will be revealed at the final judgment.

To retain our hope and optimism for the ultimate triumph of God over evil, we must safeguard the integrity of the doctrine of the final judgment. To do away with the final judgment, either in its investigative or executive phases, would mean to negate a final human accountability, to deny a future revelation of God’s justice and mercy, and to regard evil as a permanent reality in this world.

PART TWO

THE SCOPE OF THE FINAL JUDGMENT

1. Every Being Will Be Judged

Believers. Some religious persons are tempted to think that they are immune from the final judgment. They have no difficulty to accept the fact that “God will judge the immoral and adulterous” (Heb 13:4), but they assume that believing persons will be spared the “dread” of the last judgment. Some feel that the power of the church to bind and to loose protects them from the uncertainties of the final judgment.⁵

This notion rests on a gratuitous assumption, because the Scripture offers no basis for complacent smugness. The final judgment is universal, including both believers and unbelievers. Hebrews 10:30 cites a text from Deuteronomy (32:36) which says: “The Lord will judge his people.” Peter states this truth

even more explicitly when he writes: “For the time has come for judgment to begin with the household of God; and if it begins with us, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God?” (1 Pet 4:17). James warns that Christian teachers “shall be judged with greater strictness” (James 3:1).

The persons who will be surprised on the day of judgment, according to Jesus, are not the nonreligious but the self-satisfied religious persons who regard themselves as safe within the church. These people will say on the day of judgment: “Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?” But the sentence they will receive from Christ is: “I never knew you; depart from me, you evildoers” (Matt 7:22-23). Jesus assures us that people who pretend to be religious “will receive the greater condemnation” (Mark 12:40) on account of their greater privileges.

Every Human Being. The final judgment includes every human being who ever lived. The universality of the final judgment is clearly taught in the Scriptures. Christ said, for example, that “before him will be gathered *all the nations*, and he will separate them one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats” (Matt 25:32).⁶

Paul writes in Romans that God will “judge *the world*” (3:6) and that “we shall *all* stand before the judgment seat of God” (14:10; cf. 2 Cor 5:10).⁷ In the judgment scene of Revelation 20 all the dead, great and small, powerful and powerless, are seen standing before the judgment throne (Rev 20:12-13).

Angels. The final judgment extends beyond beings to include even fallen angels. In rebuking the Corinthians for taking fellow Christians to court, Paul says: “Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world is to be judged by you, are you incompetent to try trivial cases? Do you not know that we are to judge angels?” (1 Cor 6:2-3). The nature of this judgment will be discussed later. At this juncture it suffices to note that angels are included in the final judgment. Paul does not specify whether this judgment will extend to the unfallen angels. His usage of the word “angels” (*aggelous*) without the article suggests a group of angels rather than their totality.

Peter speaks specifically of the judgment of the fallen angels: “God did not spare the angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell [Greek, *Tartaros*] and committed them to pits of nether gloom to be kept until the judgment” (2 Pet 2:4; cf. Jude 6). Though restricted in their activities, fallen angels are not inactive. On the contrary, they are engaged in promoting the cause of rebellion and wickedness in this world. Consequently, believers

have to contend “against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places” (Eph 6:12) until their destruction at the final judgment.

While the unfallen angels, like the redeemed, participate in the work of the final judgment (Dan 7:10; Matt 13:30, 41; 2 Thess 1:7,8), the fallen angels, like the unrepentant sinners will meet their doom in the final judgment. Thus the scope of the final judgment is truly universal and final. It includes both heavenly and human beings and it represents God’s final, decisive and permanent elimination of evil and evildoers.

2. Everything Will Be Judged

Deeds, Words, and Thoughts. Most people could face the thought of the final judgment calmly, if only they could be sure that certain secret sins would remain hidden. But there is no deed, word, or thought now hidden which will not be revealed on the Day of Judgment. This truth is clearly taught in the Scriptures. Jesus said, for example, that on the day of judgment we will be accountable for careless words: “I tell you, on the day of judgment men will render account for every careless word they utter” (Matt 12:36).

The scrutiny of the final judgment extends also to our secret thoughts, as 1 Corinthians 4:5 indicates: “Do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart” (cf. Rom 2:16; Luke 12:2; Matt 10:26; 1 Tim 5:24).

All Will Be Revealed. We tend to view our lives as a collection of disparate actions, attitudes, and responses, but God sees our lives and will judge them as a whole. The real truth about us, the real direction of our lives—whether for or against Christ—will be exposed in the final judgment. Everything we have done in this life, whether openly or secretly, whether good or bad, will be revealed.

Summing up, we can say that the final judgment is universal in terms both of people and of their behavior. It will include every person who ever lived and every deed, word, and thought each person has ever done or conceived.^{d.8} All earthly distinctions—social, racial, linguistic, geographic, economic, education, political—will vanish away at the final judgment. Rudyard Kipling expresses this universality eloquently in *The Ballad of East and West* where he says: “Oh, East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet, Till Earth and Sky stand presently at God’s great Judgment Seat.”

PART THREE**THE STANDARD OF THE FINAL JUDGMENT****1. The Revealed Will of God**

Revelation Received. The standard by which saints and sinners are judged in the final judgment is the revelation each person has received of the will of God. Factors such as profession, reputation, appearance, and social connections will not influence God's final judgment. The criterion will be solely the character and conduct of each person in relation to the light received.

Paul explains that "all who have sinned without the law will also perish without the law, and all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law. For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified" (Rom 2:12-13).

Degrees of Accountability. Some persons have received a greater revelation of the will of God than others and in the final judgment their accountability will be correspondingly greater. This principle of degrees of accountability based on the light received is taught by Christ in several places. In Matthew 11:21-22, Christ says: "Woe to you, Chorazin! woe to you, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I tell you, it shall be more tolerable on the day of judgment for Tyre and Sidon than for you" (cf. Luke 12:47-48). The inhabitants of Tyre and Sidon will be treated more leniently in the final judgment than those of Bethsaida because they had fewer opportunities to understand the will of God for their lives.

Gradation of the Punishment. This principles of degrees of accountability implies a "gradation" of the punishment of the lost. This is taught by Christ also in the parable of the Faithful and Unfaithful Servants: "And that servant who knew his master's will, but did not make ready or act according to his will, shall receive a severe beating. But he who did not know, and did what deserved a beating, shall receive a light beating. Every one to whom much is given, of him will much be required; and of him to whom men commit much they will demand the more" (Luke 12:47-48). In the final judgment each person will be measured, not against the same standard, but against one's response to the light received.

The Less Privileged. Millions of persons have lived and are living today without the knowledge of Christ as God's supreme revelation and means of salvation. These persons may find salvation on account of their trusting response to what they know of God. It is for God to determine how much of His will is disclosed to any person through any particular religion.

In Romans 2 Paul explains that “when Gentiles who have not the law do by nature what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that what the law requires is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness and their conflicting thoughts accuse or perhaps excuse them on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus” (vv. 14-16).

It is because God has written certain basic moral principles in every human conscience that every person can be held accountable—“without excuse” (Rom 1:20)—in the final judgment. A pleasant surprise will be to meet among the redeemed “heathen” who never learned about the Good News of salvation through human agents.

Ellen G. White writes that “among the heathen are those who worship God ignorantly, those to whom the light is never brought by human instrumentality, yet they will not perish. Though ignorant of the written law of God, they have heard His voice speaking to them in nature and have done the things that the law required. Their works are evidence that the Holy Spirit has touched their hearts, and they are recognized as children of God.”⁹

The More Privileged. Those who have been privileged to receive God’s revelation contained in the Old and/or New Testaments will be judged by their response to this revelation. Old Testament prophets repeatedly warned their contemporaries to live according to the principles God had revealed to them in order to receive the blessings of life rather than the punishment of death (Deut 10:12; Is 1:12-20; Amos 5:4-25).

In the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus, Jesus makes the point that the revelation given to Old Testament believers through Moses and the prophets was sufficient for their salvation. When the Rich Man asks Abraham to resurrect Lazarus and send him to warn his rich brothers, Abraham responds: “If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced if some one should rise from the dead” (Luke 16:31).

Response to Christ. The decisive factor in the final judgment determining the eternal destiny of New Testament believers is their response to Christ’s teachings and provision of salvation. Jesus said: “He who rejects me and does not receive my sayings has a judge; the word that I have spoken will be his judge on the last day” (John 12:48). The same words of Christ that give eternal life to those who accept them (John 3:18) will bring eternal death to those who reject them: “Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears my word and believes him who sent me, has eternal life; he does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life” (John 5:24; cf. 3:36).

The statement “he does not come into judgment” (*krisis*) can hardly mean that his case will not be considered in the final judgment, since “we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ” (2 Cor 5:10; cf. Rom 14:10). Since “judgment” is the opposite of eternal “life” in John 5:24, the meaning of the text must be that believers will not be condemned in the final judgment because of their constant “hearing” and “believing” (present tense in Greek) in Christ.

The Greek noun for judgment used here (*krisis*) is often used with the meaning of condemnation (John 3:19; 5:29; 2 Thess 2:12). Paul expresses the same view with a related word when he says: “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Rom 8:1). Those who accept Christ stand under no condemnation either in the present life or in the future judgment because they have received both forgiveness for their sins and grace to fulfill in their lives “the just requirement of the law” (Rom 8:4).

2. Faith or Works?

Judgment According to Works. The preceding discussion raises a vital question: If justification or condemnation in the final judgment is determined respectively by one’s obedience or disobedience to the known will of God, does this mean that works rather than faith are the basis of the final judgment? Such a view appears in open contradiction to the Biblical teaching of justification by faith, apart from works (Gal 2:16, 21; Rom 3:27). How could God initially justify a person by faith, apart from works, and then at the End judge the same person according to the works done? Before attempting to resolve this apparent contradiction, it is important to recognize that the Scripture does indeed teach that the final judgment will be according to works.

A Teaching of the Old and New Testaments. This teaching runs through both the Old and New Testaments. Psalm 62:12 expresses the commonly accepted principle that God requites a person “according to his work.” In Jeremiah 17:10, God says: “I the Lord search the mind and try the heart, to give to every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his doings.”

The same principle is taught in the New Testament. In Matthew 16:27 Christ says: “For the Son of man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay every man for what he has done.” Paul writes that God “will render to every man according to his works” (Rom 2:6). Peter reminds his readers that God “judges each one impartially according to his deeds” (1 Pet 1:17). Revelation closes with the promise: “Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense, to repay every one for what he has done” (Rev 22:12; cf. 20:12).

This principle of judgment according to works is explicitly illustrated in Matthew 25. Here the reason given by Christ for offering entrance into the kingdom to those at His right hand is: “For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me” (vv. 35-36). The refusal to do these same acts of mercy is given as the reason for the fate of those who “will go away into eternal punishment” (v. 46).

Connection between Works and Faith. How can the Biblical teaching of the final judgment according to works be reconciled with the teaching of salvation through faith in Christ, apart from works? If God gives us the gift of eternal life through faith, how can He judge us according to our deeds? Several attempts have been made to resolve these two apparently contradictory teachings.¹⁰

In our view, the resolution which best reflects the total Biblical thought is what may be termed the *dynamic view of faith*. According to this view, the salvation of the believer depends from beginning (justification) to end (judgment), not on faith or works taken in isolation, but rather on a combination of the two, namely, a *working faith*.

Faith and works are intimately connected together in the experience of salvation. The faith that saves is not merely a passive acceptance of the divine provision of salvation, but an active response manifested in works. As John Calvin once put it, “It is . . . faith alone which justifies, and yet the faith which justifies is not alone.”¹¹ Reformed authors often use the analogy of the eye to emphasize the relationship between faith and works. The eye alone sees. There is no other human organ that can be an instrument of vision. Yet the eye by itself, torn away from the body, does not see. Similarly, faith alone saves, but a faith which is alone without works does not save.

James and Paul. On this point Paul and James are in full agreement, though their different emphases have led some to perceive a contradiction between their teachings. James condemns a passive faith which is different from the active faith which Paul commends. Similarly Paul condemns the “works of the law”—that is those works which are performed to earn salvation by fulfilling the law through human effort—which are different from the works springing from faith which James commends.

James is not speaking about the works of the law in chapter 2:14-26. He is speaking of the works which are the expression of faith, as illustrated by the example of Abraham, whose works were an evidence of the reality of his faith

(James 2:21-24). Paul agrees wholeheartedly with James that works or fruits deriving from an active dynamic faith are indispensable to “inherit the kingdom of God” (Gal 5:21)

It is often ignored that Paul distinguishes between the “works” by which no person can gain a standing before God (Gal 2:16; Rom 3:27-28) and the “works” of faith by which a person will be approved in the final judgment: “each man’s work will become manifest; for the Day will disclose it” (1 Cor 3:13). “For he will render to every man according to his works: to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; but for those who . . . do not obey the truth but obey wickedness, there will be wrath and fury” (Rom 2:6-8).

A Judgment about Faith. The final judgment “according to works” will be in a sense a judgment about faith. It will reveal if the professed faith was indeed genuine. If the faith was genuine, then works will be there as evidence. If the works are not there, then the faith was not real. James expresses this truth very strikingly: “But some one will say, ‘You have faith and I have works.’ Show me your faith apart from your works, and I by my works will show you my faith” (James 2:18).

The final judgment is not a judgment of our own merits, but of our faith-response to God’s grace extended to us freely through Jesus Christ. God will not ask: What works have you done to deserve eternal life? But He will ask: What are your “fruits of righteousness which come through Jesus Christ” (Phil 1:11)? To put it differently, God will ask for the “proof” of a living, active faith (Rom 5:4; 2 Cor 9:13). The task of the Christian is not to perform daily an adequate amount of works to pass the final judgment, but rather to verify daily that his faith is alive, “working through love” (Gal 5:6).

Paul expresses his striving for this verification of the reality of his faith in dramatic ways. He says, for example, “I pommel my body and subdue it, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified” (1 Cor 9:27). “Brethren, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but one thing I do, . . . I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (Phil 3:13-14). He also admonishes believers saying: “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for God is at work in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure” (Phil 2:12-13). Since it is God Himself who is guiding the willing and the working, in the final judgment the Christian will be asked not about his personal achievements, but about his faith-response to the workings of God in his own life.

3. The Method and the Standard of Judgment

Confusion between Method and Standard. The apparent tension between justification by faith and final judgment according to works is often caused by a misunderstanding of the relation between the *standard* of the final judgment and the *method* by which that standard is to be reached.

Impressed by Paul's emphasis on righteousness by faith apart from works as a method of salvation (Rom 3:27-28; Gal 2:16), some have concluded that the standard of the final judgment is not the *Christian's works* but faith in *Christ's works*. The purpose of the Biblical statements which speak of judgment according to works is allegedly to cause people to seek for justification by faith where divine mercy is to be found. Thus faith is the only operative principle which determines both the present justification and the final judgment.

The problem with this view is that in its legitimate concern to stress the *method* of salvation, namely, righteousness by *faith*, it ignores the *standard* of judgment, namely, *righteousness* which is made possible through faith in Jesus Christ. Pushed to the extreme, this view promotes justification of *sinfulness* rather than justification of *sinner*s by faith. Such a view rests on an arbitrary, one-sided reading of Paul. It focuses on what the apostle teaches on the *method* of salvation while ignoring his equally important teachings on the *standard* of judgment.

God's Gift and God's Claim. In his presentation of the dynamics of salvation both in Romans and in Galatians, Paul discusses first the method and then the standard of salvation. In the first eleven chapters of Romans as well as in the first four of Galatians, Paul explains with a variety of illustrations that the method of salvation is God's gift of grace and not human achievement (Rom 3:21-28; 10:9-10; Gal 2:16; 3:10-11; 4:28-30). However, after his exposition of God's gift (method) of salvation, Paul devotes the remaining chapters in both epistles to discuss God's claim (standard) of conformity to His will through the grace of Christ.

To focus on *God's gift* of salvation while overlooking *God's claim* of conformity to His will means to sell short not only the teaching of Paul but also that of the Scriptures as a whole. The divine grace that saves us from the penalty of sin continues to operate to the end in our lives by leading us to "walk in newness of life" (Rom 6:4) and in a new conformity to God's will, which is the standard of the final judgment: "Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect" (Rom 12:2).

An Indissoluble Connection. Paul recognized the indissoluble connection between what God gives to use through Jesus and what He claims of us through the power of His Spirit. Salvation is a gift of grace, but the acceptance of this gift requires a response of obedience which shows the genuineness of our faith.

The gift of God's grace teaches us "to live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; looking for that blessed hope and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:12, 13). It is because God has given us through Christ freedom from the penalty and power of sin (Rom 8:1-3) "that the just requirements of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit" (Rom 8:4).

Proof of Faith. God's claim confronts us with an unquestionably high standard of righteousness to be reached through the power of His Spirit (1 Cor 7:19). The purpose of God's gift of grace is not to excuse our sinful nature, but to transform it into His likeness (Rom 12:2).

The proof of the transformation of our sinful nature is our actions, or what Paul calls the "fruit of the Spirit" (Gal 5:22). This explains why in the final judgment God "will render to every man according to his works" (Rom 2:6). "Works" or "fruit" are decisive in the final judgment because they constitute the proof of the acceptance by faith of God's gift of salvation. As Emil Brunner aptly says: "The question is not whether the doing of good is decisive, but whether one arrives at the doing of good in his own strength."¹²

The conclusion then is that *the method* of salvation by faith does not contradict but confirms *the standard* of the final judgment according to works, because the works which God requires are those which spring from a living faith. The present of works will be the evidence of the existence of a genuine faith. As Ellen White states: "A living faith is always manifested by works."¹³ Thus judgment according to works means that the faith that saves both now and then is *not a presumptuous faith* but *a practicing faith*. As Jesus said: "Not every one who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven" (Matt 7:21).

4. The Final Judgment is Just and Serious

The Judgment is Just. Judgment on the basis of works implies that God's judgment will be perfectly just because it will be based on facts, not on fiction. Human judgments often rest upon appearances or upon partial knowledge of the facts. They can consider the actions but not the motives that prompted them. On the contrary, "we know that God's judgment . . . is based

on truth” (Rom 2:2; NIV), because it rests on the full knowledge of the covert motives as well as of the overt actions of each person who ever lived. In the final judgment the Lord “will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart” (1 Cor 4:5; cf. Rom 2:16).

It would be a mistake to think of God’s justice as strict legalism. In the Scripture God’s justice is always mingled with mercy. God is not acting at one time moved by justice and at another time inspired by mercy. In Him, mercy and justice are mingled together to form the one consistent attitude of *merciful justice*. God will not assume a different attitude or role for the purpose of the final judgment. On the contrary, He will be the same God who has created and sought to redeem His creatures. “Judgment is without mercy,” says James, only for the “one who has shown no mercy; yet mercy triumphs over judgment” (James 2:13).

The Judgment is Serious. Judgment according to works means also that the final judgment will be serious, fraught with eternal consequences. The good or evil a person has done will determine his or her eternal salvation or condemnation because it will reflect the acceptance or rejection of the gift of salvation. “A time is coming,” Jesus said, “when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out—those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned” (John 5:28, 29, NIV).

The seriousness of the final judgment is sometimes expressed in the Bible in terms of the wrath of God. In fact, the day of judgment is sometimes called “the day of wrath” (Rom 2:5), and “the great day of wrath” (Rev 6:17; cf. 11:18). In Revelation 14, God’s final judgment upon the wicked is compared to the vintage of the earth which is thrown “into the great wine press of the wrath of God” (v. 19). God’s wrath is not a sudden outburst of anger, a “seeing red,” but is rather the manifestation of His intense displeasure “against all ungodliness and wickedness of men” (Rom 1:18).

God’s wrath is the inevitable consequence of His holiness, righteousness, and love. Being a holy God, He does not wink at sin but takes every transgression of His known will in absolute seriousness (Ex 34:7). Christ’s death on the cross represents a unique revelation of the full weight of God’s judgment and wrath upon sin (Rom 3:24-25; 1 John 4:10). If Christ bore such a heavy judgment for our sins, “how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation?” (Heb 2:3; cf. 10:26-27).

The Judgment is not a Myth. An increasing number of scholars find unacceptable and intolerable the notion that God’s wrath will be manifested upon those who reject His will. They reason on the basis of certain

universalistic passages (such as Rom 11:32, 36; 1 Cor 15:24-28; Eph 1:9-10; Col 1:19), that ultimately God will be “all in all” by saving every person through His irresistible love.

This view, known as Universalism, interprets the “awkward” texts which speak of the condemnation of the final judgment as mythological expressions designed to underline the existential urgency of responding to God. The outcome of this liberal interpretation is vividly expressed in a famous phrase by H. Richard Niebuhr: “A God without wrath brought men without sin into a kingdom without judgment through the ministration of a Christ without a cross.”¹⁴

A fuller account of Universalism will be given later in this chapter. At this juncture it suffices to note that such a view not only fails to take seriously the clear Biblical teaching regarding the final judgment, but ultimately it also destroys the meaning of both human freedom and divine love. Leon Morris rightly emphasizes that “if we are to retain a fundamental Christian optimism we must insist on the serious issues involved in a real doctrine of judgment.”¹⁵

In summation, the standard of the final judgment is the trusting response of each person to the known will of God. This response will be measured by the presence or absence of “works”—“fruit” which derive from a living faith “working through love” (Gal 5:6). The standard of judgment according to works is not contradicted, but confirmed by the method of salvation by faith, because the works that God requires are those which spring from a living faith. The standard of the final judgment is just, serious, and consistent with God’s saving purpose, for it is based on the practice of one’s faith rather than on a mere profession.

PART FOUR

THE NATURE OF THE ADVENT JUDGMENT

1. The Judgment of the Second Advent

Emphasis on Preparation not on Calculation. The Scripture refers to the final judgment in a multiplicity of ways: “the day of judgment” (Matt 11:22; 12:36; 2 Pet 2:9; 1 John 4:17), “the hour of his judgment” (Rev 14:7), “the day of wrath” (Rom 2:5; Rev 11:18), “the last day” (John 6:39), “the great day” (Jude 6), “that day” (Matt 7:22). These and similar designations are intended not to specify the exact *time* or duration of the final judgment, but rather to stress its singularity and its many-sided grandeur.

As in the case of the Second Advent, so in the case of the final judgment, Scripture emphasizes the *preparation* for the event rather than the *calculation*

of its time. The reference to “the hour” or “the day” of the judgment does not imply that the final judgment will last sixty minutes or twenty-four hours, since these expressions are also used in Scripture to characterize an indefinite period of time. Thus “the day of trouble” is a period characterized by trouble, and “the day of salvation” is a period noted for its outstanding manifestation of God’s favor or grace.

Concomitant with the Second Advent. Numerous Biblical passages present the final judgment as being concomitant with the Coming of Christ. In Matthew 25 Jesus says that the gathering of “all the nations” before “his glorious throne” will take place “when the Son of man comes in his glory” (vv. 31-32). At that time the separation will take place between “the sheep” and “the goats.” Paul admonishes not to “pronounce judgment before time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart” (1 Cor 4:5). The judgment here is explicitly linked to the Coming of Christ.

Jude says that Enoch prophesied, saying: “See the Lord is coming with thousands upon thousands of his holy ones to judge everyone, and to convict all the ungodly of all the ungodly acts they have done” (vv. 14-15, NIV). Passages such as these clearly indicate that the final judgment will take place in conjunction with the Second Advent. At that time, Paul writes, “God’s righteous judgment will be revealed. For he will render to every man according to his works: to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; but for those who are factious and do not obey the truth, but obey wickedness, there will be wrath and fury” (Rom 2:5-8).

2. An Executive Act or an Investigative Process?

A Judgment Process. The passages just quoted present the judgment as being primarily an *executive act* carried out by Christ at His Coming. Christ comes “to execute judgment on all” (Jude 15), to “render to every man according to his works” (Rom 2:6), to separate “the sheep from the goats” (Matt 25:32). There are other passages of Scripture, however, which present the final judgment as a judicial *investigative process* conducted in the presence of heavenly or human beings.

Jesus says that His followers will be given the privilege of “judging the twelve tribes of Israel” (Matt 19:28). The “queen of the South” and the Ninevites who repented “will arise at the judgment” and condemn the impenitents (Matt 12:41-42). Paul speaks of the redeemed who will judge the angels (1 Cor 6:3).

John the Revelator saw the final judgment held before “a great white throne,” where “books were opened” and all the dead “were judged by what they had done” (Rev 20:11-13). A similar judgment scene is described in Daniel 7 where “one that was ancient of days took his seat; . . . and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him; the court sat in judgment, and the books were opened . . . judgment was given for the saints of the Most High, and the time came when the saints received the kingdom” (vv. 9, 10, 22).

Revelation or Inauguration of Judgment? The passages just cited speak of a judicial process conducted in the presence of a large number of angels and/or of redeemed which can hardly be concomitant with the Second Advent itself. How could Christ’s followers, for example, participate in the Advent judgment, if they themselves are to be judged?

The New Testament presents the Second Advent of Christ as the time which marks not the *inauguration* of a great court session—a Grand Assize that investigates the thoughts, words, and deeds of every person who ever lived—but rather as the time which marks the *revelation* and *execution* of the divine judgment which has already taken place. It is the time, as Paul says, “when God’s righteous judgment will be revealed” (Rom 2:5). Such a revelation presupposes a previous investigative process generally called by Seventh-day Adventists an “investigative judgment.”

3. Misconceptions of the Advent Judgment

Christ the Stern Judge. Traditionally the Second Advent has been viewed as the Coming of a stern Judge who sets up a Grand Assize before which every person will appear to give an account of his or her life. This view not only distorts the Biblical teaching on the final judgment but also undermines the Advent Hope. J. E. Fison correctly observes that today “if Jesus is expected at all, it is only as the judge that he is expected, and in fact the judge who is expected is often no longer the authentic Jesus.”¹⁶

When Christ is expected to come as a Judge who sets up a Grand Tribunal to investigate the case of every person who ever lived, then it is no wonder that many Christians prefer not to think at all about the Second Advent. For them, the Advent does not spell the hope of meeting the Savior and of receiving the reward of eternal life, but rather the fear of standing before the Judge who will expose publicly all the secret sins of their lives.

Anticipation of Final Judgment. In an attempt to overcome the dread of the Advent judgment, some historic churches such as Roman Catholicism have anticipated the believer’s encounter with Christ and placed consequent judgment at the moment immediately after death. Anthony Wilhelm writes *in*

Christ Among Us—a best-seller presentation of the Catholic faith—“It is Christ whom we encounter after death face to face, in the clearest, most intimate way possible.”¹⁷

The outcome of this belief is that death rather than the Second Advent becomes the climatic experience of our life. Such a belief, as noted earlier, ultimately negates the necessity of the Advent and of the final judgment, since it is at death that each person meets Christ and the final judgment: paradise, purgatory, or hell.

Multiplication of Final Judgments. Other Christians have attempted to reconcile the differing descriptions of the final judgment by distinguishing among three, four, or even seven different types of judgments. The Scofield Bible, for example—an American production still widely used by Evangelical Christians—distinguishes among seven judgments, namely, (1) the judgment of believers at the Second Advent; (2) the judgment of the nation of Israel after the Second Advent and the regathering of Israel as a nation; (3) the judgment of Babylon before Christ returns; (4) the judgment of the beast, the false prophet and their armies at the Return of Christ; (5) the judgment of the nations after the defeat of their armies by Christ at His Return; (6) the judgment of Satan and his angels at the end of the millennium; and (7) the judgment of the unsaved dead before the great white throne after the millennium.¹⁸

4. The Unity and the Finality of the Final Judgment

A Single Event, not Multiple Events. The attempts to fix the final judgment at the death of each person, or to distinguish among different types of final judgments, robs the event of the singularity, finality, and terminality which the Scripture attributes to it. The Bible speaks of the future judgment as a single event. It teaches to look forward not to *different days* of judgment but to *the day* of judgment.

Paul says that God “has fixed” not “*days—several times*” but “*a day* on which he will judge the world in righteousness” (Acts 17:31). This day of judgment is for both the saved and the unsaved. Christ speaks of “*the hour*” that “is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come forth, those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of judgment” (John 5:28-29; cf. 2 Pet 3:7; Rom 2:5-8). In this statement Christ presents both the resurrection and the final judgment as being *single* and *not multiples events*.

Need to Preserve Unity. It is important to preserve this Biblical sense of unity and finality of the final judgment in any attempt to reconcile those passages which speak of it as a *divine act* with those passages describe it as

an *investigative process* involving heavenly or human beings. In our view, the Seventh-day Adventist understanding of the final judgment best respects its unity and finality and best reconciles the tension between the *executive act* of the final judgment and the *judicial processes* associated with it.

Unfortunately in the past the Adventist view of the final judgment has often been misunderstood and misinterpreted, sometimes because of a lack of an adequate theological formulation. It is our hope that this presentation will contribute to clarify the Adventist understanding of this vital Biblical teaching. No attempt is here made to express an Adventist consensus, but rather to articulate an “adventist understanding” of the final judgment which is fully compatible with Adventist beliefs.

5. The Seventh-Day Adventist View of the Final Judgment

The Great Controversy Concept. The basis of the Adventist understanding of the final judgment is the “Great Controversy” concept. This concept embraces the origin, development, and final resolution of the conflict between good and evil. A most dramatic description of the origin of this conflict is found in the well-known imagery of Revelation 12, which speaks of a war that “arose in heaven” in which Satan and his angels “were defeated” and expelled (vv. 7-9). This conflict which began in heaven was extended on this earth (vv. 13-17), where it will continue until Satan is imprisoned for “a thousand years” (Rev 20:1-3). At the end of this period Satan will be ultimately destroyed in “the lake of fire and brimstone” (Rev 20:7-10).

The final judgment is seen in Adventist theology as a vital, climactic aspect of the divine resolution of this “Great Controversy” which extends beyond the human world to include heavenly beings (Eph 3:10; 6:12; Col 1:16; 2:15; Rom 8:38). Through the final judgment God accomplishes at least two important objectives. On the one hand, God reveals and executes His “righteous judgment” (Rom 2:5-6), which will terminate the human and the heavenly rebellion and usher in His everlasting kingdom. On the other hand, through the final judgment God provides an opportunity to His moral creatures to understand and accept the justice of His giving eternal life to some and everlasting death to others (Rev 15:3, 4).

Evaluative and Executive Phases. The eternal security of a moral universe is largely determined by the extent to which its rational created beings understand and accept the justice of God’s judgments. This trustful acceptance of the rightness of God’s judgments could hardly be gained from a final judgment consisting exclusively of a unilateral and inscrutable executive act of Christ, who at His Advent renders to each person reward or retribution according to his words.

Thus, Seventh-day Adventists believe that God's final judgment encompasses both an *evaluative* and an *executive* phase. The latter is carried out by Christ at His Return when He will grant the gift of eternal life to living and resurrected believers and the punishment of death to the living wicked (2 Thess 1:7-10; Matt 25:31-32; Rom 2:5-7).

The former—the evaluative phase—takes place before and after the Second Advent. An important purpose of this investigative process is, as we shall see in the next chapter, to enable heavenly and human beings fully to understand and accept the rightness of God's final judgment. This Adventist understanding of the final judgment as consisting of both an evaluative and an executive phase preserves the singularity, unity, and finality which the Scripture attributes to this event.

This understanding provides also, as we shall see, a valid criterion for harmonizing those passages which describe the final judgment as an *executive act*, with those which portray it as an *investigative process* involving heavenly or human beings. Ultimately, the “wholistic” Adventist understanding of the final judgment enhances our appreciation of God's justice and it strengthens our expectation of the Second Advent.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 13

1. For a brief discussion of those theologians who either ignore or reject the future final judgment, see Leon Morris, *The Biblical Doctrine of Judgment* (Grand Rapids, 1960), pp. 54-58.

2. T. Francis Glasson, “The Last Judgment in Rev. 20 and Related Writings,” *New Testament Studies* 28 (1982), p. 537.

3. Anthony A. Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future* (Grand Rapids, 1979), p. 253.

4. *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook 1985* (Washington, D.C., 1985), p. 14.

5. T. F. Torrance rightly complains that in the medieval church “the *Eschaton* is so domesticated and housed within the Church that, far from standing under final judgment, the Church dispenses it by her binding and loosing” (*Kingdom and Church* [London, 1956], p. 2).

6. Emphasis supplied.

7. Emphasis supplied.

8. Leon Morris aptly remarks, “That all of life is sufficiently important for God to take notice of it and to require account of it is not something to be repudiated and shunned. It is to be welcomed. It is part of the good news” (n. 1), p. 65.

9. Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, California, 1940), p. 638.

10. For a concise summary of the various proposed resolutions to the tension between the role of works and faith in the final judgment, see Ivan T. Blazen, “A Tension Resolved,” *Adventist Review* (August 11, 1983), pp. 7-9.

11. *Acts of the Council of Trent with the Antidote*, cited by Anthony A. Hoekema (n. 3), p. 261.

12. Emil Brunner, *The Letter to the Romans* (London, 1959), p. 20.

13. Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View, California, 1948), vol. 1, p. 620.

14. H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Kingdom of God in America* (New York, 1959), p. 193.

15. Leon Morris (n. 1), p. 69.

16. J. E. Fison, *The Christian Hope* (London, 1954), p. 129.

17. Anthony Wilhelm, *Christ Among Us* (New York, 1975), pp. 418-419.

18. For a concise discussion of these judgments see Henry C. Thiessen, *Lectures in Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, 1979), pp. 388-392. J. Dwight Pentecost reduces the judgments to four (*Things to Come. A Study in Biblical Eschatology* [Grand Rapids, 1980], pp. 412-426).

Chapter 14

THE INVESTIGATIVE JUDGMENT AND THE ADVENT HOPE

Someone has said that in the new world there will be three surprises for the redeemed. First, there will be the surprise to discover that some of the “saints” most people expected to find there will not be there. Puzzled, and confused, some will ask: How can such a godly person as Mr. Smith be missing? Second, there will be the surprise to note that some of the “sinners” most people thought would never make it to the Kingdom in actual fact will be there. “How can Mrs. Morris be here when she did not attend church for several years?” some will wonder. Third, there will be the most pleasant surprise of all, namely, to find oneself there.

Surprise about God’s criteria for offering eternal life to some while allowing others to experience eternal death could give rise to feelings of doubt and mistrust about the fairness of God’s judgments. If allowed to persist, such feelings could threaten the eternal security of the new world. Rebellion against God could arise a second time and the redemptive mission of Christ into this world would have been in vain.

The eternal security of the new world will rest on the unquestioning attitude of trust, love, and obedience to God of its inhabitants. This attitude cannot be demanded, it can only be earned. A significant method used by God to gain and maintain the unconditional love and trust of His creatures is by making adequate provision for them to understand and accept the justice of His judgments. Numerous Scriptural passages to be considered in this chapter speak of God’s inviting the moral beings of His universe to participate in His final judgment process that will decide the eternal destiny of people and angels (Dan 7:10, 22, 26; Matt 19:28; 12:41, 42; 1 Cor 6:2-3).

Historically little or no attention has been given to the role which heavenly and human beings play in God's final judgment. The focus has been primarily on the executive aspect of the final judgment. Even this aspect has been viewed primarily as a day of gloom and doom on which Christ will manifest His vengeance by inflicting punishment upon the wicked.

Objective of Chapter. The objective of this chapter is to ascertain the Biblical understanding of the judicial process which precedes and follows the Advent judgment. A brief analysis will be made of the most significant passages which refer implicitly or explicitly to the judicial process of the final judgment. The final part of the chapter will reflect upon the theological significance of the Biblical teaching on this subject. The study is divided into the following four parts:

1. The Pre-Advent Phase of the Final Judgment
2. The Post-Advent Phase of the Final Judgment
3. The Outcome of the Final Judgment
4. The Theological Significance of the Final Judgment

PART ONE

THE PRE-ADVENT PHASE OF THE FINAL JUDGMENT

1. Biblical Emphasis on Reality of Judgment

Reality More Important than Modality. The emphasis of the Scriptures is not on the dynamics of the final judgment, but rather on its inevitability and finality. To Bible writers the *reality* of the final judgment was more important than its *modality*. This observation applies to other Biblical truths such as the Second Advent and the resurrection. For example, no attempt is made by Christ or by most of the New Testament writers to differentiate between the resurrection of believers at the time of Christ's Coming and the resurrection of unbelievers at the end of the millennium.

Jesus speaks of "the hour" that is coming "when *all* who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come forth, those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of judgment" (John 5:28-29). In this statement Christ presents the resurrection of the "good" doers and that of the evildoers as taking place contemporaneously (cf. Matt 25:32; Luke 11:32). Yet John the Revelator distinguishes between the two resurrections by placing the former at the beginning of the millennium and the latter after "the thousand years were ended" (Rev 20:4-5).

Fact More Important than Phases. To a scientific modern mind, those two statements stand in open contradiction. Yet Biblical writers had no

difficulty in reconciling the two statements because for them the *reality* was more important than the *modality* of the resurrection. In fact, most of the references to the resurrection mention the *fact* rather than the *phases* or manner of the event.

The same principle applies to the Biblical references to the final judgment. In most cases the concern is to emphasize the *reality* and *finality* of the event rather than its *modality*. Yet as in the case of the resurrection so in that of the final judgment, there are some Biblical passages which implicitly suggest a Pre-Advent and a Post-Advent phase of the final judgment. A study of these passages offers a fuller appreciation of the dynamics of the final judgment.

2. The Pre-Advent Judgment in the Teaching of Jesus

The Notion of Reward. The notion of a Pre-Advent judgment is an underlying assumption of much of Jesus' teachings. Such a notion is implied even in those numerous passages where the technical terms for judgment are not used. Jesus often spoke about receiving or missing God's *reward*, which implies a previous evaluative judgment.

In Matthew 5 each of the Beatitudes contains a promise of reward (5:1-12). In verse 46 Jesus says: "If you love those who love you, what reward have you?" The same notion is found several times in the following chapter and throughout the Gospels: "Beware of practicing your piety before men in order to be seen by them; for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven" (Matt 6:1; cf. 6:2, 4, 5, 16, 18; 10:41, 42; Mark 9:41; Luke 6:23, 35).

The Time of Rewards. The time for assigning rewards or retribution is clearly given as the Second Advent: "For the Son of man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and *then* he will repay every man for what he has done" (Matt 16:27; cf. 25:31-32). In this and similar statements, the Second Advent is perceived as the time for the assignment of rewards or punishments, and not for the evaluation of what each person deserves. In *none* of the statements of Jesus is the suggestion ever made that He will set up the traditional Grand Assize at His Return to investigate and determine the destiny of every person who ever lived.

Since the time of Christ's Coming is primarily the occasion for bestowing rewards or punishments, we may reasonably assume that the evaluative process that determines such decision takes place *before* the Advent. Some may wish to argue that there is no need for God to investigate the deeds and attitudes of each person to determine what they deserve, because He already knows it all. There is some truth in this argument, for God obviously does not

need to seek for lacking information about His creatures. Yet, Jesus and other Biblical writers speak of a judgment that will investigate not only deeds, but also words: “I tell you, on the day of judgment men will render account for every careless word they utter” (Matt 12:36).

The purpose of this investigation, as we shall see, is not to enable God to ascertain the truth about each person, but rather to expose and disclose this truth to His moral universe. Our immediate concern, however, is not to understand the purpose of God’s evaluative judgment but rather to acknowledge its reality and validity. We have already noted that a Pre-Advent judgment is presupposed by the fact that Christ comes not to institute a judgment process but to execute the judgment which has already taken place.

Human Accountability. The notion of a Pre-Advent judgment is also implied in Christ’s statements about *human accountability*. Jesus said that the extent of our accountability includes not only acts but also “every careless word” (Matt 12:36). Paul expresses the same thought when he writes that God will judge “the secrets of men by Christ Jesus” (Rom 2:16). Such a thorough investigation of the conduct of the billions of persons who have lived on this planet presupposes a Pre-Advent judicial process because, as noted earlier, the Advent judgment is primarily the moment of final adjudication or separation and not the institution of a judicial investigative process.

In some of His parables, Christ illustrates the principle of human accountability at the final judgment. In Matthew, for example, three parables are given following the Olivet Discourse which illustrate areas of accountability. In the parable of the Ten Virgins the emphasis is on the accountability for our *spiritual preparation* (Matt 25:1-13). In the parable of the Talents, the area of accountability is the *stewardship of our resources* such as time, money, and skills (Matt 25:14-30). In the parable of the Sheep and Goats, the area of accountability is our *social responsibility* toward the needs of others (Matt 25:31-46).

Dead Resurrected Already Judged. The accountability of each human being is obviously decided before Christ comes to call forth “those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of judgment” (John 5:28-29). The resurrection to life or to condemnation represents Christ’s executive judgment which presupposes the termination of the evaluative judgment. In this text Christ indicates that people will be resurrected *not to be judged* but *already judged*. If those who are resurrected to eternal life or death were still to be judged, we would have an incongruous situation whereby the results of the judgment would be meted out before the convening of the judgment itself.

The phase “resurrection of judgment” actually means “resurrection of condemnation,” since it is contrasted with the “resurrection of life.” This meaning is accurately rendered in the New International Version: “those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned.” The judgment that decides who “will rise to live” and who “will rise to be condemned” must obviously take place before the resurrection itself. This thought was expressed by Christ in a conversation with the Sadducees when He said that only “those who are accounted worthy” will “attain to that age and to the resurrection from the dead” (Luke 20:35).

The Notion of Separation. The idea of the separation that will take place at the Coming of Christ between the saved and the unsaved also presupposes a Pre-Advent judgment. Jesus describes this Advent separation in a variety of ways. He compares it to the separation that takes place at harvest time between the wheat and the weeds. Note that the reapers are simply told: “Gather the weeds . . . gather the wheat” (Matt 13:30). There will be no need for them to ascertain which is the wheat and which is the weeds because by harvest time the distinction between the two has already been established.

Jesus illustrates the Advent separation also by the parable of the good and bad fish. In the parable the task of the angels is not to determine who are “the evil” and who are “the righteous,” but simply to separate one from the other (Matt 13:49). The implication is that the determination of the status of each has already taken place.

A dramatic reference to the Advent separation is found in the Olivet Discourse where Jesus, speaking of the day of “the coming of the Son of man,” says: “Then two men will be in the field; one is taken and one is left. Two women will be grinding at the mill; one is taken and one is left” (Matt 24:40-41). The sudden separation between the saved and the unsaved presupposes a previous determination of their respective destinies.

The Sheep and the Goats. The Advent separation is also compared by Christ to a shepherd who “separates the sheep from the goats,” by placing the former at the right hand and the latter at the left (Matt 25:32-33). In a similar fashion Christ “will say to those at his right hand, ‘Come, . . . inherit the kingdom . . .’” and “to those at his left hand, ‘Depart from me, . . . into the eternal fire’” (Matt 25:34, 41).

Some have interpreted the description of the gathering of all the nations before Christ (Matt 25:32) as representing a universal investigative judgment conducted at the time of Christ’s Return. The description, however, contains

only Christ's *invitation* and *condemnation* (Come, . . . Depart . . .) with the respective *explanation* ("For I was hungry and you gave me food" or "you gave me no food"), but not an *investigation* of who did or did not act compassionately. The judicial process that led to this determination is presupposed as having already occurred.

The Wedding Garment. A Pre-Advent evaluation process is also presupposed in Christ's parable of "a king who gave a marriage feast for his son" (Matt 22:2). When the original guests refused to come to the marriage feast, the wedding invitation was extended to as many as could be found and "so the wedding hall was filled with guests" (vv. 3-10). The king went to a great deal of expense not only in extending the invitation but also, according to custom, in supplying to each guest a beautiful robe to wear for the occasion. "But when the king came in to look at the guests, he saw there a man who had no wedding garment" (v. 11).

Evidently the king examined the guests *before* the marriage feast began. In Revelation 19, the Coming of Christ is compared to the "marriage of the Lamb" (vv. 7, 17). The consistency of this imagery suggests that the marriage feast of Matthew 22 is an allusion to the celebration that will accompany the Second Advent. The Church, espoused to Christ by faith (Eph 5:32), waits, as in the parable of the Ten Virgins, for the Coming of the Heavenly Groom to celebrate the marriage feast. If this interpretation is correct, then the examination by the king of the wedding guests *before* the celebration of the marriage feast would represent an evaluation process that will take place before the Coming of Christ.

Ellen White offers this interpretation when she writes: "In the parable of Matthew 22 the same figure of the marriage is introduced, and the investigative judgment is clearly represented as taking place before marriage. Previous to the wedding the king comes in to see the guests, to see if all are attired in the wedding garment, the spotless robe of character washed and made white in the blood of the Lamb . . . This work of examination of character, of determining who are prepared for the kingdom of God, is that of the investigative judgment, the closing work in the sanctuary above."¹

This brief survey indicates that the idea of a Pre-Advent evaluative judgment is an underlying assumption in much of Jesus' teaching about the judgment. Each of the themes examined (reward, accountability, and separation) presupposes a Pre-Advent judicial investigation that determines who is "accounted worthy" to attain to the resurrection of life and who to the resurrection of condemnation (Luke 20:35; John 5:28-29). This notion of a

Pre-Advent evaluative judgment is implicitly expressed, as we shall now see, by other New Testament writers.

3. The Pre-Advent Judgment in Paul's Writings

Emphasis on Certainty. Paul, like Christ, emphasizes the certainty and inevitability of the final judgment, rather than its modality. He writes that “we shall all stand before the judgment seat of God; . . . So each of us shall give account of himself to God” (Rom 14:10-12; cf. 2 Cor 5:10; Acts 17:31).

No explicit explanation is given by Paul regarding the time of this universal accountability before the judgment seat of God. Did Paul associate this universal accountability with the Coming of Christ? If he did, he failed to indicate it, especially in his references to the Second Advent, which he describes as the joyful reunion of believers with their Lord and not as the inauguration of a judicial process that will examine each person who ever lived.

Revelation Presupposes Investigation. The Advent judgment is seen by Paul as the disclosure (1 Cor 4:5) or revelation of God's judgment rather than as a process of judicial investigation. In Romans 2:5, he describes it as the time “when God's *righteous judgment will be revealed*.”² This revelation will consist of the executive act of Christ who will give “eternal life” to “those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality” and “wrath and fury” to “those who are factious and do not obey the truth” (Rom 2:7-8).

This revelation of “God's righteous judgment” presupposes some prior process of investigation that determines who is to receive the gift of eternal life and who “the punishment of eternal destruction and exclusion from the presence of the Lord” (2 Thess 1:8-9).

Dead Judged While Dead. The same inference can be drawn from Paul's reference to Christ “who is to judge the living and the dead” (2 Tim 4:1; cf. 1 Pet 4:5). The personal presence of defendants is unnecessary, because the existence of a perfect record of each life (Dan 7:10; Ps 69:28; Mal 3:16; Rev 20:12) provides all the necessary evidences for the heavenly court to see.

If the dead are judged while still dead, such judgment must precede the Advent judgment when the resurrection to eternal life or eternal death takes place. We noted earlier that people will be resurrected *already judged*. By the status of each person at the moment of the resurrection “God's righteous judgment will be *revealed*” (Rom 2:5). The *revelation* of God's judgment at the Second Advent presupposes the *termination* of God's judging before the Advent.

Judgment Precedes Appearance of Christ. As Paul comes to the end of his letter to Timothy, he challenges him by reminding him of three vital things about Christ: “I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word, . . .” (2 Tim 4:1-2).

William Barclay notes the significance of the sequential order of the charge: (1) Judgment, (2) Appearance, (3) Kingdom. This sequence, he points out, reflects the logical progression that leads to the consummation of salvation-history.³ Christ’s judgment of the living and the dead is followed by His appearance which will usher in His eternal Kingdom.

The King James Version places the judgment at the time of Christ’s appearing in its translation: “I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom.” This translation has been largely rejected by modern translators and commentators because of conceptual and textual reasons.

Conceptually the judgment would be linked not only to Christ’s appearance but also to His Kingdom. Nowhere does the Scripture suggest that Christ will judge the living and the dead in His kingdom. Textually, the preferred Greek text contains the two conjunctions “*kai . . . kai*” (and . . . and): “*and* by his appearing *and* his kingdom” (RSV). The New International Version, like the Revised Standard Version, accurately renders the Greek text: “In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom I give you this charge: Preach the Word, . . .”

A Three-Parts Composition. Martin Dibelius and Hans Conzelman note that Paul’s charge “is to be regarded as formulaic, as in 1 Tim 5:21.”⁴ In the latter text Paul’s charge to Timothy also contains three elements: “In the presence [1] of God and [2] of Christ Jesus and [3] of the elect angels I charge you . . .” (1 Tim 5:21). The structural similarity between the two charges supports a three-part composition for both.

Moreover, since Paul’s charge to Timothy is expressed by a liturgical formula, presumably it represents a basic Christian belief. Liturgical formulas express basic truths of the Christian faith. In such a case, Paul’s progressive sequence: Christ’s judgment of the living and dead, His appearing and His kingdom, presumably represents the prevailing understanding of the sequence of events leading to the consummation of salvation-history.

Second Advent Precludes Investigative Judgment. Of all the New Testament writers, Paul provides the most vivid and informative descriptions of the Second Advent. Our understanding of the manner of Christ’s Coming

and of the events associated with it would be very deficient if we did not possess Paul's descriptions of this event (1 Thess 4:13-18; 2 Thess 1:7-10; 1 Cor 15:51-58).

The Pauline descriptions, however, exclude the possibility of a universal investigative judgment being set up and conducted by Christ at His Second Advent. This can be seen by looking at the sequence of events given by Paul in 1 Thessalonians 4:

1. Glorious descent of Christ from heaven (v. 16)
2. Resurrection of the "dead in Christ" (v. 16)
3. Transformation of living believers (v. 17)
4. Meeting of believers with the Lord (v. 17)
5. Eternal communion with the Lord (v. 17)

The shorter description found in 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10 makes mention only of the immediate outcome of Christ's Coming, namely, "eternal destruction" for the wicked and glorification for the "saints." Both descriptions of the Second Advent make no mention of or allowance for a universal judicial process conducted in conjunction with the Second Advent. The Coming of Christ is followed immediately, not by a judgment process, but by Christ's executive act which resurrects/transforms believers and destroys unbelievers. Any process of evaluation and determination of each human destiny has already taken place before the Parousia.

A Prevailing Misconception. Many Christians mistakenly view the resurrection as the preliminary step to the final judgment. Thus, the judgment is regarded as an event distinct from the resurrection and taking place after it. This is not the teaching of Jesus or of Paul or of the rest of the Biblical writers who view the resurrection to life or to death as being the revelation and execution (Jude 15) of God's righteous judgment.

J. A. Seiss perceptively notes in this regard: "The truth is, that the resurrection, and the changes which pass 'in the twinkling of an eye' upon the living, are themselves the fruits and embodiments of antecedent judgment. They are consequences of adjudications then already made."⁵

4. Pre-Advent Judgment in the Book of Revelation

Centrality of Judgment. The theme of judgment is central to the book of Revelation. The book opens with the vision of Christ executing the final judgment upon the wicked: "Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, every one who pierced him; and all the tribes of the earth will wail on account of him" (1:7). Their reason for mourning is that Christ has come to execute judgment upon impenitent evil hearts. The book closes with

the vision of the judgment before the Great White Throne (20:11-15) and with the promise “Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense, to repay every one for what he has done” (22:12).

The rest of the visions are in a sense a series of judgments. First the church is warned about God’s judgment if she does not repent (2:5, 16, 26; 3:3, 16, 21). Then a series of judgments are predicted for the heathen world. They begin with the Seven Seals (6-7) and continue with the Seven Trumpets (8-14) and the Seven Plagues (15-16). They close with the description of God’s judgment upon Babylon (17-18), the beast and the false prophet (19:20), Satan (20:10) and all the wicked who ever lived (20:12-15). A crescendo is noticeable from the partiality of the preliminary judgments (“a third of”—8:7, 8, 11; 9:15) to the totality of the final judgment (“every living thing”—16:3; “all were judged”—20:13).

The theme of judgment is central in Revelation because it represents God’s method of finally overcoming the opposition of evil to Himself and His people. The martyrs who cry for judgment (6:10) are reassured that God will shortly vindicate them. When finally the redeemed stand beside the sea of glass they sing: “O Lord God the Almighty! Just and true are thy ways, . . . for they judgments have been revealed” (15:3-4).

Phases of the Final Judgment. The emphasis on the centrality and finality of God’s judgment in Revelation overshadows the concern to differentiate between its phases: Pre-Advent, Advent, Post-Advent judgment. Yet these distinctions are not altogether absent. For example, it is explicitly stated that “judgment was committed” to those who share “in the first resurrection” (20:4, 6).

Evidently this phase of the judgment is conducted after the Advent since its participants shared in the first resurrection associated with Christ’s Return. Similarly, the judgment before the Great White Throne presumably takes place after the Second Advent, since it is held before the One from whose “presence earth and sky fled away” (20:11)—a clear allusion to the Second Advent (6:13-14). Thus, the Book of Revelation implicitly recognizes certain distinct phases of the final judgment.

The Vision of the Lamb. The Pre-Advent judgment is presupposed in several places. The series of preliminary judgments mentioned earlier anticipate and foreshadow the final judgment. A more specific allusion to a Pre-Advent judgment can be seen in the vision of the Lamb holding the scroll of human destiny, sealed with seven seals (ch. 5). This scroll, which contains the complete destiny of mankind (“written within and on the back”—5:1),

rests safely in the “right hand” of God (5:1), as the seven stars rest firmly in the hands of Christ (1:16).

There are at least three reasons why the sealed scroll seems to represent the divine decision-judgment regarding the destiny of every human being. First, the fact that only the Lamb that was slain is worthy to open it (5:9) implies that its content has to do with the decision regarding the salvation or perdition of human beings. Second, Revelation refers several times to “the book of life of the Lamb that was slain” which is said to contain “the names” of the redeemed (13:8; 17:8; 21:27).

Third, the only book that is ever opened in Revelation is “the book of life” during the judgment before the Great White Throne (20:11-12). It is said that “if any one’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire” (20:15). The removal of the seals by the Lamb, which results in the manifestation of preliminary divine judgments upon mankind, seems designed to build up to the climactic moment when the suspense is broken by the opening of the book, which discloses who is to be punished with “the second death” (20:14).

Judicial Elements of the Vision. This vision of the Lamb holding the sealed scroll, technically speaking, does not appear as a judgment session. Yet under closer scrutiny the vision contains some clear judicial elements. The image of the Lamb, for example, which is used 29 times in Revelation, as John A. Bollier notes in his perceptive study on “Judgement in the Apocalypse,” is “the predominant symbol representing Christ as Judge.”⁶

The title “Lamb” is used interchangeably with “the Lion of the tribe of Judah” (5:5). Thus the figure of the Lamb represents not so much the meek and mild aspect of Christ, but rather His victory which gives Him authority to judge. The wicked fear “the wrath of the Lamb” (6:16).

The Lamb is surrounded by living creatures, elders, and “many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands” (5:11). This vision is reminiscent of the judgment scene found in Daniel 7 where “a thousand thousands served him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him; and the court sat in judgment, and the books were opened” (Dan 7:10).

Approval of Judgment. In Revelation the multitude of heavenly beings do not sit in judgment before opened books, but rather ascribe to the Lamb the right “to take the scroll and to open its seals” (5:9). They are satisfied to let Christ reveal and proclaim the final verdict regarding human destinies because they acknowledge that He was “slain” and by His “blood didst ransom men for God from every tribe and tongue and people and nation.” (5:9).

By acknowledging the right of Christ to open the scroll and reveal God’s

verdict regarding human destinies, these heavenly beings implicitly approve the judgment process which has already taken place. Their approval is determined by their understanding of how God's justice and mercy have been manifested through the Lamb who has ransomed people of "every tribe and tongue and people and nation" (5:9).

This vindication of the justice of God's government is a vital function of the Pre-Advent judgment, to be discussed later. At this juncture we conclude that the vision of the Lamb holding the sealed scroll in its own unique way implies a Pre-Advent judgment in which heavenly beings express their approval of God's final judgment and of Christ's right to reveal that judgment by opening the seals.

The Announcement of Judgment. A clearer portrayal of the Pre-Advent judgment is found in Revelation 14. This chapter contains three distinct visions, each introduced by the phrase: "Then I looked . . ." (14:1, 6, 14). The first vision present the 144,000 singing the song of triumph before God's throne (14:3). They are said to be the "first fruits" of the redeemed (14:4). This vision introduces the next two visions, the first of which announces God's judgment (14:6-13) and the second of which describes its execution (14:14-20).

The function of the introductory vision is to offer to believers the assurance of divine vindication on the day of the judgment. In the light of this setting the proclamation of God's judgment that follows is not a moral deterrent, but a moral stimulant to live "chaste," "spotless" lives (14:4-5) in the expectation to "follow the Lamb wherever he goes" (14:4).

The second vision describes three angels flying in mid-heaven, proclaiming three judgment messages. The first angel declares: "Fear God and give him glory, for the hour of his judgment has come; and worship him who made heaven and earth, the sea and the fountains of water" (14:7). The second angel announces God's judgment upon Babylon (14:8) and the third warns people about God's judgment upon those who worship the beast and its image (14:9-11).

The Last Call to Repentance. The third vision portrays dramatically the execution of the final judgment by Christ at His Coming by means of the imagery of the harvest (14:14-20). It is noteworthy that the harvest of the earth is preceded by the announcement that "the hour of his judgment has come" (14:7). This announcement is designated as the "eternal gospel" (14:6). This means that the time of judgment that precedes the execution of the final judgment at Christ's Coming is not a time of no return, but rather the time when God sounds the last call to repentance. The Pre-Advent judgments in

Revelation, as aptly stated by John A. Bollier, “are educative in purpose rather than vindictive or retributive. They are meant to bring both the church and the world to repentance.”⁷

The Timing of the Judgment. The timing of the announcement that “the hour of his judgment has come” is significant. It comes, as noted by John A. Bollier, between the end of the first two series of judgments (seven seals and seven trumpets—chs. 6 to 13) and beginning of the last series of judgments (seven plagues, punishment of Babylon, of the beast, the false prophet, Satan and the wicked—chs. 15 to 20).⁸ What this means is that the judgment announced by the first angel begins before the outpouring of the seven last plagues, which terminate with the Coming of Christ (16:15).

The Pre-Advent nature of the first angel’s judgment-message is indicated by the fact that it precedes the third vision of the same chapter which describes the two harvests reaped by Christ at His Coming. The first is the harvest of the grain which represents the gathering of the righteous into God’s Kingdom (14:14-16). The second is the harvest of the grapes which refers to the vintage of God’s wrath manifested in the condemnation of the wicked (14:17-20).

The fact that the announcement about the beginning of the judgment is made before Christ comes “for the harvest of the earth” (14:15) suggests that his is the Pre-Advent phase of the final judgment. This is a time when not only an evaluative judgment is conducted in heaven, but also God’s last call to repentance is given on this earth.

As in the typical Levitical system the trumpets were blown ten days before the Day of Atonement to call the people to repentance during the Pre-Atonement judgment, so in the antitypical service an angel announces with loud voice that “the hour of his judgment has come” and calls upon mankind to repent and worship God during the Pre-Advent judgment and before the Advent harvest.

5. Pre-Advent Judgment in the Book of Daniel

Judgment Vision. The seventh chapter of the book of Daniel describes a most impressive judgment *vision* which sheds light on the nature and timing of the Pre-Advent judgment. The chapter is structured in three parts and each of them climaxes with a court scene in heaven around the throne of “the Ancient of Days.”

In the first part (7:1-14) Daniel describes a vision in which he saw an unfolding of historical powers symbolized by the successive arising out of the sea of four great beasts, each different from the other. Daniel is astonished

by the dreadfulness of the fourth beast out of which arises a persecuting power represented by a little horn with “eyes like the eyes of a man, and a mouth speaking great things” (7:8).

While observing the little horn, Daniel’s gaze shifts heavenward where he sees the dazzling appearance of the Ancient of Days seated on His throne: “a thousand thousands served him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him; the court sat in judgment and the books were opened” (7:9-10). While viewing this celestial tribunal, Daniel’s gaze shifts back momentarily earthward, where he sees God’s judgment being visited upon the insolent despot and the beasts (7:11-12).

Then Daniel’s gaze shifts back again to heaven where he sees “a son of man” coming to “the Ancient of Days” to receive His eternal dominion and Kingdom “which shall not pass away” (7:13-14). It is noteworthy that the celestial judgment in this first scene begins after the appearance of the insolent Little Horn, and before the Coming of the Son of Man to receive the eternal Kingdom. Thus the sequence of events clearly indicates that the heavenly judgment described in verses 9-10 precedes the Coming of Christ to establish God’s eternal kingdom.

The Explanation of the Vision. In the second part of the chapter (7:15-22), Daniel asks for and receives the explanation of the meaning of the four beasts. He is told that the four beasts represent four kings, the last of which will give rise to a power which will make war against “the saints” (7:21). The persecution of the saints by this despotic power will continue “until the Ancient of Days came, and judgment was given for the saints of the Most High, and the time came when the saints received the kingdom” (7:22).

This second part adds some details to the judgment scene of vv. 9-10, by explaining that the judgment concerns both the persecuting power and the persecuted saints. The outcome of the judgment is the reception of the kingdom by the saints. Here, as in the first court scene, the heavenly judgment is a process that precedes the establishment of God’s Kingdom.⁹

An Additional Explanation. In the third part of the chapter (7:23-28), the angel returns and gives to Daniel an additional explanation about the terrible fourth beast (7:23-24) and especially about the powerful apostate “little horn” who will endeavor to “wear out the saints of the Most High, and . . . to change the times and the law” (7:25).

The climax of this vision, as in the previous two, is again the heavenly court which sits “in judgment,” condemns the godless tyrant and divests him of all power (7:26). These heavenly judicial proceedings result in the giving of the eternal kingdom “to the people of the saints of the Most High” (7:27).

Time of the Judgment. We noted that each of the three parts of Daniel 7 climaxes with the scene of a heavenly judgment and in each instance this judgment stands in historical sequence after the war against the saints by the despotic little horn and before the Coming of Christ to establish God's eternal kingdom.

The complete historical sequence runs as follows: Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, Rom, ten horns, apostate horn, judgment, Coming of the Son of Man, establishment of God's eternal Kingdom. This sequence indicates that the judgment is not an executive act carried out on this earth at the time of Christ's Return, but the evaluative process conducted in heaven before myriads of heavenly beings prior to the Second Advent.

A Comparison with Revelation 5. A parallel vision is found in Revelation 5 where, as already noted, myriads of heavenly beings surround the throne of God, expressing their approval of the worthiness of the Lamb to open the scroll which contains God's verdict regarding human destinies. Both in the vision of Daniel 7 and in that of Revelation 5, all the angelic hosts are present to give their approval to God's judgment regarding the destiny of mankind.

In the former vision they are seen as participating in the judgment process, while in the latter they are shown as expressing their approval of the right of the Lamb to reveal God's final judgment. In a sense, these two judgment visions are complementary since they indicate that heavenly beings participate in the final judgment both by investigating the records and by approving Christ's right to reveal the final verdict. The large participation of heavenly beings in this Pre-Advent judgment suggests that this is one of the greatest events of salvation-history.

Sanctuary Vision of Daniel 8. The vision of Daniel 8 covers much the same ground as that of Daniel 7, but it defines more precisely the commencement of the Pre-Advent judgment. The judgment scene of Daniel 7 is thematically linked to the purification ("cleansing") of the sanctuary in Daniel 8. The time of the latter is clearly eschatological since the angel repeatedly explains to Daniel that "the visions is for the time of the end" (8:17; cf. vv. 19, 26).

The End-time is linked to the time prophecy of Daniel 8:14 where a heavenly being says: "For two thousand and three hundred evenings and mornings; then the sanctuary shall be restored to its rightful state." The "restoration" or "cleansing" (KJV) of the sanctuary occurred in Old Testament times annually on the Day of Atonement (Lev 16:29-30). This event, as will be shown shortly, typologically represented the final judgment that will bring about the eradication of sin. On the basis of the terminological and

contextual connection which exists between Daniel 8 and 9—a connection recognized by several scholar¹⁰—Seventh-day Adventists believe that the seventy-weeks prophecy of Daniel 9:24-27 provides the starting point of the 2300 day-year prophecy of Daniel 8:14.¹¹

The starting point of both prophecies is the first decree of Artaxerxes of 457 B.C. (Dan 9:25) which provided for the repatriation of the Jews and the rebuilding of Jerusalem. Accordingly, the endpoint of time of the 2300 day-year prophecy falls into the year A.D. 1844. Since that time the Pre-Advent phase of Christ's heavenly ministry has been going on. The nature of this ministry will be clarified shortly in our study of the typology of the Day of Atonement.

The Scope of the Judgment. The scope of the Pre-Advent judgment described in Daniel 7 and 8 includes both a judgment *against* the enemies of truth, of God and His people (7:25-27; 8:11-14, 23-25) and a judgment *in favor of* “the saints of the Most High” (7:22). In either case this judgment discloses the “rightness” of the divine verdict of salvation or punishment.

This judicial process is conducted on the basis of a perfect record of each human life kept in so-called “books”: “the court sat in judgment, and the books were opened” (7:10). Here Daniel does not explain which books were opened. The Scripture, as mentioned earlier, refers to several books (Mal 3:16; Ps. 69:28; Rev 3:5; 20:12; Phil 4:3). Whatever these books are, they must contain a record of all the relevant “facts” which include motives as well as overt and covert actions. These data enable the heavenly assize to evaluate and thus vindicate the “rightness” of God's judgment.

The Outcome of the Judgment. The outcome of this judicial process described in Daniel 7 is the complete destruction of God's enemies (“destroyed to the end”—7:26) and the reception of the “everlasting kingdom” by “the people of the saints of the Most High” (7:27). The finality of this outcome indicates that this is the final judgment which determines the eternal destiny of each human being.

This final outcome is described in similar terms in the vision of Daniel 12. In the latter, Daniel is shown Michael delivering during the “time of trouble . . . every one whose name shall be found written in the book” (12:1). The verdicts contained in “the book” presumably determine also who is to have part in the resurrection “to everlasting life” or in the resurrection “to shame and everlasting contempt” (12:2).

In Daniel 12, there is no mention of any judicial process but reference is made to the execution of the verdicts contained in “the book,” namely, the

resurrection to eternal life for some and to eternal contempt for others. This executive phase presupposes the evaluative phase described in Daniel 7. Thus Daniel 12:1-3 complements the judgment vision of Daniel 7 by describing the outcome of the latter in terms of resurrection to “everlasting life” or “everlasting contempt.”

The “books” which are opened in Daniel 7:10 to inaugurate the Pre-Advent judgment are the basis that determines which “name shall be found written in the book” of Daniel 12:1, when eternal destinies are adjudicated. Revelation presumably refers to the same book when it says: “if any one’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire” (Rev 20:15). In short, Daniel 7 describes the evaluative phase of the final judgment which determines the eternal destiny of every human being and which precedes the executive phase when the actual granting of rewards and punishment will take place.

6. Pre-Advent Judgment in the Typology of the Day of Atonement

A Time of Judgment. The need for a final judgment, in both its investigative and executive phases, was effectively taught in Old Testament times through the rituals of the Day of Atonement. The great Day of Atonement was viewed as a time of solemn judgment which dealt in a total and final way with the accumulated sins of Israel. This annual day of judgment and cleansing was rendered necessary by the sins which symbolically had been transferred and accumulated in the sanctuary during the daily atonement through the rite of blood (Lev 4:5, 6, 16-18) and the rite of eating the sacrificial flesh by the priest (Lev 6:24-30; 10:18).

These accumulated sins of Israel were disposed of in a *corporate* (“all their/your sins”—Lev 16:16, 22, 30, 34) and *conclusive* (“you shall be clean”—Lev 16:30) manner, through the elaborate ritual of the Day of Atonement, which included a sacrifice for the priest, a sacrifice for the people, and the release of Azazel (Lev 16).

A Judgment Process. The final disposition of Israel’s sins was the outcome of a judgment process which began on the first day of the seventh month (New Year) with a “blast of trumpets” (Lev 23:23) to usher in a period of repentance. This period of soul-searching which lasted ten days, that is, until the Day of Atonement (Lev 23:27), was in a sense an investigative judgment during which God judged in a total and final way the accumulated sins of Israel.

The judgment nature of this period was clearly established by the rabbis who taught: “The judgment is passed on New Year and the decree is sealed

on the Day of Atonement.”¹² The judgment-function of the Day of Atonement is also indicated by the fact that people were asked to “afflict” themselves (Num 29:7), that is, to repent and to confess their sins. Anyone who refused to participate in this corporate repentance was to be “cut off from his people” (Lev 23:29).¹³

Judgment Ritual. The judgment-nature of the Day of Atonement can be seen also in the ritual performed on that day. It was only on that day that the high priest appeared before the Shekinah glory of God, which was manifested above the ark of the covenant (the throne of God’s judgment—Rev 7:15; Ps 99:1; 80:1), to present the cases of all the people.

Inside the ark were the tables of the law (Ex 40:20), representing the moral standard of God’s judgment (Ps 89:13-14). The believer did not appear in person before God’s judgment throne, but waited expectantly and penitentially while the high priest presented his case before God. This ritual effectively symbolized, as we shall see, Christ’s entrance into the heavenly sanctuary “to appear in the presence of God on our behalf” (Heb 9:24).

A Time of Vindication. The judgment of the Day of Atonement was not intended to be punitive but redemptive. It was a day in which the Israelite was vindicated by God before his fellow beings and before the universe. This redemption/vindication was expressed in a variety of ways. For example, the focal point of the priestly atonement was the *mercy seat* (cover of the ark where blood was sprinkled seven times (Lev 16:14-15) to reassure the people that God had fully “covered” their sins.

The vindication of the believer was in a sense the vindication of God’s justice manifested in saving those who accepted His atonement for their sins. Such a vindication was finally shown through the rite of the goat Azazel upon which were symbolically transferred Israel’s sins (Lev 16:21). Azazel, as symbol of Satan (Enoch 6:7—“chief of fallen angels”), was taken into the wilderness to pass away (Lev 16:21-22) and thus indicate the permanent removal and elimination of sin.

Jubilee Celebration. The finality of the cleansing and elimination of sin was also expressed through the blasting of the ram’s horn (“*yobel*” from which “jubilee” derives—Lev 25:9) at the close of the services of the Day of Atonement to usher in the New Year and the Jubilee Year every 49th year.

It is noteworthy that the liberation and restoration of the Jubilee Year was ushered in by the cleansing and new moral beginning granted by God to His people on the Day of Atonement. This may explain why the imagery of the

Jubilee's trumpet blast is used in the Scripture to describe both the messianic ingathering of the exiles (Is 27:13; Zech 9:9-14) and the Return of Christ (Matt 24:31; 1 Thess 4:16; 1 Cor 15:52).

All of this shows that the Day of Atonement marked *the end* of the judgment process of sin and resulted in *the beginning* of a new order. It symbolized God's final and conclusive disposition of the sins of the people as a whole and the restoration of a new covenant relationship.

7. The Heavenly Antitypical Day of Atonement

The Reality of the Heavenly Sanctuary. The momentous typological significance of the Day of Atonement as a judgment process resulting in the final cleansing and vindication of God's people points to corresponding redemptive activities performed by Christ. The Scripture teaches the existence of this correspondence by explaining how the earthly sanctuary and its services typified the corresponding greater reality of the heavenly sanctuary is established especially in Hebrews by means of *vertical* and *horizontal* typologies.

Vertically, the *heavenly* sanctuary is presented as the "true tent" (Heb 8:2), the "perfect tent" (Heb 9:11; cf. 9:24), of which the *earthly* one was a "symbolic" pattern (Heb 9:9; cf. 8:5; Act 7:44; Ex 25:40). Similarly, the priestly services and sacrifices of the earthly tabernacle are seen as a "copy and shadow" (Heb 8:5) of the "more excellent" (8:6) High Priestly ministry conducted by Christ in the heavenly sanctuary (Heb 7:24-25; 8:4, 11-13; 10:11-21).

Horizontally, the *past* (before Calvary) typological services of the earthly sanctuary (Heb 9:6-9) are viewed as fulfilled and superseded by the *present* heavenly intercession and mediation of Christ (Heb 9:9, 11-14). The existence of a real heavenly sanctuary where Christ ministers as High Priest and Intercessor is also attested by the numerous Biblical references to a heavenly sanctuary-temple or parts of it (Is 6:1; Ezek 10:3; Rev 1:13; 7:15; 11:19; 14:17-18).

Christ's Ministry in the Heavenly Sanctuary. The typological correspondence between the earthly and the heavenly sanctuaries presupposes a correspondence between them in the priestly ministry performed. In the earthly sanctuary, the priestly ministry consisted of two phases: (1) a daily service of *intercession* in the Holy Place, and (2) an annual service of *judgment* and cleansing in the Most Holy on the Day of Atonement. These two phases of *intercession* and *judgment* find their correspondence in Christ's ministry in the heavenly sanctuary.

Intercession. The first phase of Christ's ministry of *intercession* began at the time of His ascension to heaven and installation at the right hand of God (Acts 2:33-34; 7:56; Heb 8:1-2). The outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost is seen as the evidence of the official enthronement of Christ to His heavenly ministry (Acts 2:33). The installation of Christ to His heavenly ministry is reflected in those passages which speak of His sitting at the right hand of God (Acts 2:34; Eph 1:20; Col 3:1; Heb 1:3, 13).

The meaning of "sitting" as intercessory ministry is explained especially in Hebrews 8:1-2, where Christ is presented as the "high priest, . . . seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, a minister in the sanctuary and the true tent." Through His intercessory ministry, Christ sustains the Church (Rev 1:13, 20), mediates repentance and forgiveness to believers (Acts 5:31; 1 John 2:1-2; 1:9), makes our prayers acceptable to God (John 16:23-24; Rev 8:3), and provides us with the invisible and yet real assistance of His angels (Heb 1:14; Rev 5:6; 1:16,20).

Judgment. The second and final phase of Christ's heavenly ministry involves, as in the earthly sanctuary, a *judgment* process which results in the final disposition of sin and the jubilee-celebration at His Second Coming. This final phase of Christ's heavenly ministry represents not a replacement of, but an addition to the work of intercession. The special sacrifices of the Day of Atonement were offered in addition to the "continual [daily] burnt offering" (Num 29:11).

Intercession is intrinsically related to judgment because the positive or negative response to the gift of salvation offered through Christ's intercession presupposes a final judgment that reveals what each response has been. Both intercession and judgment are the work of the same High Priest. Intercession is Christ's work in actualizing His redemptive love manifested at the cross. Judgment is Christ's work in realizing His redemption in a final and conclusive way at the end of history. Thus the difference between the two is one of perspective: intercession is the work of Christ viewed from the perspective of His First Advent. Judgment is the work of Christ viewed from the perspective of His Second Advent.

The Cleansing of the Heavenly Sanctuary. The Scripture alludes to the final phase of Christ's heavenly ministry in a variety of ways. Hebrews, for example, establishes a correspondence between the cleansing of the earthly sanctuary and that of the heavenly sanctuary: "Thus it was necessary for *the copies* of the heavenly things [the earthly tabernacle and its vessels—9:21-22] to be purified with these rites, but *the heavenly things* themselves with better sacrifices than these" (9:23). This text emphasizes the necessity of the

“cleansing” of the “heavenly things” and its accomplishment through the “better sacrifice” of Christ which does not need to be repeated annually as did the typical Day of Atonement (9:25).¹⁴

How is the heavenly sanctuary cleansed? Hebrews recognizes *past*, a *present*, and a *future* aspect in Christ’s removal of sin represented by the Day of Atonement. In the *past*, Christ “*has appeared* once for all at the end of the age to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself” (9:26). In the *present* (“now”), Christ *appears* in the presence of God on our behalf” (9:24). In the *future*, Christ “*will appear* a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him” (9:28).¹⁵

The past, the present, and the future ministry of Christ are in Hebrews ideologically connected because they are all dependent upon the same “once for all” sacrifice on the Cross. It is the same atoning sacrifice that enables Christ to fulfill the two phases of His ministry in the heavenly sanctuary: intercession and judgment.

An “Already” and a “Not-Yet” Fulfillment. In a sense the Cross represents an “*already*” fulfillment of the Levitical Day of Atonement, since through it Christ “put away sin by the sacrifice of himself” (Heb 9:26). This, however, does not lessen the “*not-yet*” future and final aspect of Christ ministry. The principle of a double fulfillment—“an already and not-yet”—is common in the New Testament. The author of Hebrews recognizes that the Cross does not exhaust Christ’s redemptive ministry, because he explains that Christ not only “appeared” in the past “to put away sin” but also appears now in the present before God’s presence and “will appear” in the future to save.

The ministry of Christ “in the presence of God on our behalf” (9:24) includes both a work of intercession and a work of judgment. Regarding the first, Hebrews says that Christ “always lives to make intercession for them” (7:25). Regarding the second, Hebrews suggests that the work of the investigative judgment will be completed before Christ comes. This suggestion is made by means of the following comparison: “And just as it is appointed for men to die once, and after that comes judgment, so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him” (9:27-28).

Pre-Advent Judgment. In this passage the author correlates human death which will be followed by the final judgment (cf. Heb 10:26-27) with Christ’s atoning death which will be followed by His Second Advent. In this correlation, the judgment is placed in “correspondence with the Second Advent. Yet the judgment implicitly precedes the Second Advent because the

author says that the latter does not “deal with sin.” Christ “will appear a second time,” not to judge but “to save those who are eagerly waiting for him” (9:28).

The implication is that the judgment process that decides who is to receive the gift of eternal life is completed before Christ comes. As the appearance of the High Priest out of the sanctuary at the end of the Day of Atonement marked the completion of the judgment process which resulted in the final disposition of sin and the inauguration of a new covenant relationship with God, so Christ’s Second Advent appearance at the end of the antitypical Day of Atonement marks the completion of the process of judgment which results in the bestowal of eternal life to those “who are eagerly waiting for him” (9:28).

The above survey indicates that the concept of a Pre-Advent evaluative judgment is clearly implied in different ways in the Scripture. This concept is an underlying assumption of much of the teachings of Jesus and of Paul. More explicit descriptions of the Pre-Advent judgment are found in the apocalyptic judgment visions of Daniel (chs. 7 and 8) and Revelation (chs. 5 and 14).

Valuable insights into the Pre-Advent judgment work of Christ are provided also by the typological correspondence which Hebrews establishes between the ministry of the Day of Atonement performed by the high priest in the earthly sanctuary and that performed by Christ in the heavenly. These cumulative indications point convincingly to a Pre-Advent phase of the final judgment.

PART TWO

THE POST-ADVENT PHASE OF THE FINAL JUDGMENT

1. The Fact of a Post-Advent Judgment

The Testimony of Christ. Several Scriptural passages clearly attest that a judgment will be conducted by the redeemed after Christ’s Return. Christ promised to His followers that “in the new world, when the Son of man shall sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel” (Matt 19:28).

The number twelve, which is used in this verse to refer both to thrones and to tribes, must not be understood as referring exclusively to the twelve disciples judging only the twelve literal tribes of Israel, but rather inclusively to all Christ’s followers judging all the unsaved. This interpretation is supported both by the symbolic meaning of the number twelve, which stands

for the totality of God's people, and by other passages to be considered below which speak inclusively of all the redeemed participating in the judgment of all the unsaved.

The Testimony of Paul. In rebuking the Corinthians for taking fellow-believers to court, Paul makes this startling statement: "Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world is to be judged by you, are you incompetent to try trivial cases? Do you not know that we are to judge angels? How much more, matters pertaining to this life!" (1 Cor 6:2-3).

Three points in this statement deserve attention. First Paul's rhetorical question ("Do you not know . . . ?") implies that it was a *well-known fact* that the saints "will judge the world." Thus the doctrine of the redeemed participating in a Post-Advent judgment process is viewed by Paul as a well-known and established fact.

Second, "the saints will judge *the world*." Obviously "the world" must be the world of the unsaved, otherwise the saints would be judging themselves. The fact that the "saints" are doing the judging implies that they themselves have already been judged in the Pre-Advent judgment which has granted them admission into God's kingdom.

Third, the saints will judge also the "*angels*." The reference here must be to the fallen angels whom, according to Peter, God has "kept until the judgment" (2 Pet 2:4; cf. Jude 6). In summary, according to Paul, the resurrected saints will participate in a Post-Advent judgment process that will examine the cases of both the unsaved human beings and the fallen angels.

The Testimony of John. John the Revelator corroborates and elaborates the above testimonies in his description of the millennial reign of the saints: "Then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom judgment was committed. Also I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their testimony to Jesus and for the word of God, and who had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life, and reigned with Christ a thousand years. The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he who shares in the first resurrection!" (Rev 20:4-6).

This passage informs us first of all that a work of judgment is committed to redeemed persons. The identity of these people has been disputed. Many interpreters limit them to the "martyrs" who have died "for their testimony to Jesus." The language in Greek, however, suggests two groups, as correctly translated by the NIV: "I saw thrones on which were seated those who had

been given authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus” (Rev 20:4).

In other words, John envisaged two groups: one larger group of all the saints to whom judgment was given and then a smaller group—the martyrs—who are singled out for special mention. This interpretation harmonizes also with Christ’s promise found in Revelation that *all* His followers would share in His throne (Rev 3:21; 2:26; 5:9-10; cf. Matt 19:28; 1 Cor 6:2).

This passage tells us also that the saints will begin their work of judgment after they come to life at the time of the first resurrection. The latter is differentiated from the resurrection of “the rest of the dead” who come to life a thousand years later to be destroyed in the lake of fire. The time of the first resurrection is the Second Advent of Christ, which is symbolically portrayed in the preceding narrative through the imagery of a dazzling rider on a white horse coming with the armies of heaven (Rev 19:11-16).

The outcome of Christ’s Coming is the destruction of the beast, the false prophet, and the wicked, and the chaining of Satan (Rev 19:17 to 20:3). In the context of these events which transpire at Christ’s coming, John sees the enthronement of the saints who begin a work of judgment. The above testimonies of Jesus, Paul, and John make it abundantly clear that there is a Post-Advent phase of the final judgment which is conducted by the resurrected saints.

2. The Scope and the Basis of the Post-Advent Judgment

The Scope. The Post-Advent judgment will include all the unbelievers and fallen angels who ever existed. This total inclusiveness is expressed in a variety of ways. We noted that Jesus said that the judgment will include “the twelve tribes of Israel” (Matt 19:28). Paul speaks of the saints judging “the world” and “angels” (1 Cor 6:2-3). John expresses this inclusiveness in a most dramatic way: “And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened . . . And the sea gave up the dead in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead in them, and all were judged by what they had done” (Rev 20:12-13).

No matter how important (“great”) or unimportant (“small”) a person may have been, no one will be immune from the final judgment. No matter how a person died, he will be brought to life to appear before the judgment seat of God. Contrary to the prevailing notion that only those who died on dry land would rise from the dead, John says that even those who drowned and were lost in the bottom of the sea will be revived to stand before God in judgment.

In this final judgment are included not only impenitent human beings, but also “the devil and his angels” (Matt 25:41; cf. Rev 20:10).

The Basis. The judgment is conducted on the basis of evidences supplied both by the record contained in the books of the deeds and by the record found in the book of life. These two kinds of books are mentioned in Revelation. The first of these apparently contains the record of human deeds: “And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, by what they had done” (Rev 20:12). The parallelism suggests that the content of the books is the record of “what they had done.” We have seen that the idea of the judgment based on the records of people’s deeds is common in the Scripture. “The court sat in judgment,” says Daniel, “and the books were opened” (Dan 7:10).

Earlier we have shown that there is no conflict between judgment according to works and justification by faith apart from works because the works that save are those that derive from an active, working faith. By the same token, the works that will condemn people are the evil deeds that derive from unfaithfulness to God.

The concept of a record kept by God of each person’s deeds suggests that each person is writing his or her own destiny. Through the life we daily live, we are acquiring a record that will bring us either shame or honor in the final judgment. In a sense it is not so much God judging each person as it is each person writing his or her own final judgment.

The Purpose. The other book is called “the book of life”: “Also another book was opened, which is the book of life . . . and if any one’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire” (Rev 20:12, 15). This is the book which contains the names of all those who have believed in Christ. Both the Old and New Testaments often speak of the book including all the names of the righteous (Ex 32:32-33; Dan 12:1; Luke 10:20; Phil 4:3; Rev 3:5; 13:8; 21:27).

The relationship between the books of deeds and the book of life is not clear. Austin M. Farrer aptly suggests that those whose names are missing from the book of life are given the chance to understand the reason by checking the books containing the record of their lives.¹⁶

It seems plausible that this verification is also part of the judgment process performed by the saints. As stated at the introduction of this chapter, there will be surprises in God’s Kingdom as some of the respected “saints” will be absent and some of the reputed “sinners” will be present. The book of deeds will explain why some names are present while others are absent from the book of life. Thus an important function of the Post-Advent

judgment, like that of the Pre-Advent judgment, is to enable moral beings fully to understand and accept the justice of God's judgments.

3. The Relationship Between the Pre-Advent and the Post-Advent Judgment

Similarities. A comparison between the Pre-Advent and the Post-Advent phases of the final judgment suggests several similarities and some differences. There is a conceptual similarity between the description of the Pre-Advent judgment found in Daniel 7 and that of the Post-Advent judgment found in Revelation 20. George Eldon Ladd notes, for example, that in both passages are mentioned the seeing of thrones, the setting of a judgment, the presence of many beings and the reception of the Kingdom by the saints. To these can be added the opening of books and the destruction of God's opponent (Little Horn—Satan).¹⁷

There is also a functional similarity. Both the Pre-Advent and Post-Advent judgments are a judicial process that precedes God's executive act of granting final rewards or punishments. Both are designed to enable moral intelligences to evaluate and accept the justice of God's judgment in saving some and condemning others. Both decide eternal destinies of intelligent, moral beings.

Differences. There are also some differences. While the Pre-Advent judgment is held in the presence of unfallen heavenly beings, the Post-Advent judgment is conducted before saved human beings. While the former reveals God's justice in saving believers, the latter reveals His justice in punishing unbelievers. While the former results in Christ's Coming to grant eternal life to the righteous, the latter terminates with the eternal destruction of the wicked.

PART THREE

THE OUTCOME OF THE FINAL JUDGMENT

1. Two Outcomes

Two Resurrections. In the preceding study of the Pre-Advent, the Advent and the Post-Advent phases of the final judgment, mention has already been made of its two outcomes: eternal life for the saved and eternal death for the unsaved. This truth is expressed by Christ in a most simple and emphatic way in John 5:28-29: "Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out—those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be

condemned” (NIV). In this statement, the two resurrections, one to life and the other to condemnation, are presented by Christ as one event because His concern was to emphasize their ultimate outcome rather than the sequence or the manner of their occurrence.

John the Revelator, however, clarifies that there is a millennial time gap between the resurrection of the “blessed and holy” (20:6) which takes place at the time of Christ’s Coming, and the resurrection of “the rest of the dead” which occurs a thousand years later (20:5). The first resurrection is the outcome of the Pre-Advent judgment which concerns primarily the saved, and the second resurrection is the result of the Post-Advent judgment which regards the unsaved.

Disagreement on the Nature of the Punishment. There is a general consensus among Christians regarding the reward of eternal life that Christ will grant to His followers at His Advent judgment. A marked disagreement exists, however, regarding the nature of the punishment that will be meted out upon the wicked. Three different views are held today regarding God’s final judgment of the wicked. These are known as *universalism*, *eternal punishment*, and *annihilationism*. Brief consideration will now be given to each of them.

2. Universalism

Definition. Universalism is the belief that ultimately God will succeed in bringing every human being to salvation and eternal life so that no one in fact will be condemned in the final judgment either to eternal torment or annihilation. This belief was first suggested by Origen in the third century and it has gained steady support in modern times, especially through the writing of such men as Friedrich Schleiermacher, C. F. D. Moule, J. A. T. Robinson, Michael Paternoster, Michael Perry, and John Hick. The arguments presented by these and other writers in support of universalism are both theological and philosophical.

Theological Arguments. Theologically, appeal is made to “universalist passages” (1 Tim 2:4; 4:10; Col 1:20; Rom 5:18; 11:32; Eph 1:10; 1 Cor 15:22) which seem to offer hope of universal salvation. On the basis of these texts, universalists argue that if all human beings are not ultimately saved, then God’s will for “all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim 2:4) would be frustrated and defeated. Only through the salvation of all human beings can God demonstrate the triumph of His infinitely patient love.

Philosophical Reasons. Philosophically, universalists find it intolerable that a loving God would allow millions of persons to suffer *everlasting* torment for sins committed within a span of a few years. Jacques Ellul articulates this view admirably, asking the following probing questions: “Have we not seen the impossibility of considering that the New Creation, that admirable symphony of love, could exist *beside* the world of wrath? Is God still double-faced: a visage of love turned toward his celestial Jerusalem and a visage of wrath turned toward this ‘hell’? Are then the peace and joy of God complete, since he continues as a God of wrath and of fulmination? Could Paradise be what Romain Gary has so marvelously described in *Tulipe*, when he said that the trouble is not the concentration camp but ‘the very peaceable, very happy little village *beside* the camp’—the little village alongside, where people were undisturbed while millions died atrociously in the camp.”¹⁸

Purgatorial Process. Furthermore, universalists argue that it is unthinkable that in the final judgment God would condemn to eternal torment the countless millions of non-Christians who have not responded to Christ because they have never heard the Christian message. The solution proposed by some universalists is that God will save all the unfaithful by enabling them to be gradually transformed through a “purgatorial” process after death.

This view represents a revision of the Roman Catholic doctrine of purgatory which limits this remedial process only to the souls of the faithful. The universalists extend this privilege also to the souls of the *unfaithful*. Thus beyond death, God continues to draw all the unsaved to Himself until ultimately all will respond to His love and so rejoice in His presence for all eternity.

An Appealing View. No one can deny that the theological and philosophical arguments of universalism appeal to the Christian conscience. Any person who has deeply sensed God’s love longs to see God saving every person, and hates to think that God would be so vindictive as to punish millions of persons—especially those who have lived in ignorance—with eternal torments. Yet, our appreciation for the universalists’ concern to uphold the triumph of God’s love and to justly refute the unbiblical concept of a vindictive God who inflicts *eternal* suffering, must not blind us to the fact that this doctrine is a serious distortion of Biblical teaching.

Desire, not Fact. First of all, the “universalist passages” declare the *scope* of God’s universal saving *purpose*, but not the *fact* of universal salvation of every human being. For example, in Colossians 1:19-23, God’s plan “to reconcile to himself all things” is said to include the Colossian believers “*provided that* you continue in the faith.”¹⁹

Similarly, in 1 Timothy 2:4, God's *desire* for "all men to be saved" is expressed together with the *fact* of a final judgment that will bring "ruin and destruction" to the unfaithful (1 Tim 6:9-10; cf. 5:24; 4:8). God extends to all the provision of salvation, but He respects the freedom of those who reject His offer even though it causes Him utmost anguish.

Everlasting Torment. Second, the argument that God will ultimately save all because the doctrine of *everlasting* torment for the unsaved is impossible to accept, inasmuch as it negates any sense of divine justice and the very peace and joy of paradise, is a valid argument. However, such an argument, as will be shown below, rests upon an erroneous interpretation of the Biblical teaching regarding the nature of the final punishment of the wicked. Universal salvation cannot be right just because eternal suffering is wrong.

Remedial Punishment. Third, the notion of a remedial punishment or of gradual transformation after death is a notion totally foreign to the Scripture. The destiny of each person is firmly fixed at death. This principle is explicitly expressed by Christ in the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-21). In Hebrews 9:27 also it is clearly stated that "it is appointed for men to die once, and after that comes judgment." For the impenitent sinners "the prospect of judgment" is a "fearful" one because they will experience not universal salvation but "a fury of fire which will consume the adversaries" (Heb 10:26-27).

The Non-Christian. Fourth, regarding the challenge of those who had no opportunity to learn and to respond to the message of Christ, it is *not* necessary either to surrender the belief in salvation solely through Jesus Christ or to consign all the non-Christians to everlasting torment. We noted earlier that the less privileged may find salvation on the basis of their trusting response to what they have known of God.

Conclusion. Universalism, then, though attractive at first sight, is erroneous because it fails to recognize that God's love for mankind is manifested not by glossing over sins, nor by limiting human freedom, but rather by providing salvation and freedom to accept it. This truth is aptly expressed in the best known text about God's love and the danger involved in rejecting it: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

3. Eternal Punishment

The Traditional View. Those Christians who reject the universalist view of the destiny of unbelievers generally hold to one of the following two alternative views: punishment of eternal suffering, or annihilation. The

doctrine of eternal punishment is the traditional view that arose in early Christianity and has predominated throughout the centuries. Even today both Roman Catholicism and the major historic Protestant Churches generally hold the view of the eternal punishment of the unsaved.

Essentially, this view maintains that those who are condemned in the final judgment will suffer eternal punishment. It is alleged that the suffering will be both privative (*poena damni*) and positive (*poena sensus*). The former is the eternal separation and isolation from the presence of God, the latter is the eternal, unimaginable pain caused by both inner tortures of despair and external torments by fire, demons, etc.

The Basis of Eternal Punishment. The belief in eternal punishment rests on three basic arguments: (1) the belief in the unconditional immortality of the soul which presupposes eternal survival after death; (2) the assumption that divine justice requires that the sins of a moment must be punished eternally in the next life because sin causes eternal consequences that cannot be undone; and (3) the literal interpretation of those Biblical references which speak of “eternal punishment” (Matt 25:46), “eternal fire” (Matt 18:8; 25:41; Jude 7), and “eternal destruction” (2 Thess 1:9); “the smoke of their torment goes up for ever and ever” (Rev 14:11; cf. 19:3; 20:10). An evaluation of these arguments will follow immediately in conjunction with the presentation of the third view: annihilationism.

4. Eternal Annihilation

Definition. Annihilationism denies the doctrine of eternal suffering, maintaining instead that the Scripture teaches the eternal annihilation or permanent destruction of the wicked, Satan, and fallen angels. The annihilation of the wicked was already taught by some early Church Fathers and by the Socinians in the sixteenth century. It was, however, only in the mid-nineteenth century that this view began to gain ground.

Seventh-day Adventists are generally regarded as the chief exponents of this doctrine, though other churches share the same belief. In recent times, numerous scholars—influenced perhaps by Oscar Cullmann’s booklet *Immortality of the Soul or Resurrection of the Dead?*—have adopted some forms of annihilationism. Stephen H. Travis, for example, in his recent book *I Believe in the Second Coming of Jesus*, admits: “If pressed [between eternal punishment and annihilationism], I must myself opt for the latter.”²⁰

Two Different Forms. This doctrine takes at least two different forms. According to some the annihilation of unbelievers takes place at the moment of their death by ceasing to exist. According to Seventh-day Adventists,

however, the eternal annihilation of the unsaved will take place at the end of the Post-Advent phase of the final judgment (end of millennium). At that time the unrighteous dead will be resurrected and after a period of punitive suffering, they will be consumed and thus cease to exist.

The Basis of Annihilationism. The belief in the annihilation of unbelievers at the final judgment is based on at least four major Biblical and philosophical reasons. First, the Bible does not teach that human beings possess immortal souls which continue to exist independently after the death of the body. This belief derives from Greek anthropology (nature of man) according to which the human soul is naturally and inherently immortal and thus it lives on independently after the body's death. This philosophical dualism has given rise to the Christian doctrine of eternal suffering. At death, the souls of unbelievers allegedly depart from the body to be cast into the fiery Hell to suffer eternal torment, while the souls of believers are ushered into the beatitude of Paradise.

Such a view ultimately makes the Second Advent, the resurrection, and the final judgment unnecessary because at death each human being already receives eternal punishment or eternal life. This view also explains why the most confused chapters of Catholic and Protestant theological manuals are the final chapters dealing with the resurrection and the final judgment. The purpose of these events is far from clear because their outcome has already been largely anticipated at the death of each person.

Conditional Immortality. Biblical anthropology perceives man as a psychosomatic unity, that is to say, a unity of body and soul which excludes the independent survival of the soul after death. The only life after death is the resurrection of the whole person. This resurrection is presented in the Scripture, not as the reunion between disembodied souls and resurrected bodies, but as the restoration to life of the whole person of "those who are asleep" or "the dead in Christ" (1 Thess 4:13, 16).

The New Testament teaches that God "alone has immortality" (1 Tim 6:16). Human beings are "conditionally immortal," that is to say, they have the possibility of receiving the *gift* of immortality at the Parousia, but do not possess such a gift as a natural endowment. What this means is that the only way unbelievers could be made to suffer eternally would be if God would first resurrect them immortal at the time of their final judgment and then inflict upon them an everlasting suffering. Nowhere does the Scripture suggest that the unrighteous dead will be resurrected immortal so that they may experience the punishment of eternal suffering.

Images of Permanent Destruction. Second, the Biblical images used to describe the fate of the wicked such as “fire” (Matt 25:41; 3:12; 5:22; 2 Pet 3:10-12; Rev 20:10, 14, 15), “destruction” or “perish” (Matt 10:28; Luke 13:3; John 3:16; 10:28; Phil 3:19; 2 Thess 1:9) and “death” (John 5:24; 8:51; Rom 6:23; Heb 2:14-15; James 1:15; Rev 2:11; 20:14; 21:8), are images which clearly suggest annihilation rather than a continuous form of conscious existence.

It is noteworthy that Revelation uses four times the phrase “second death” (Rev 2:11; 20:6, 14; 21:8) to emphasize the final, permanent death of the wicked from which there is no return. It is said, for example, that the lot of the wicked “shall be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death” (Rev 21:8).

The phrase “second death” is used frequently in the Targum—which is the Aramaic translation and interpretation of the Old Testament—to refer to the final irreversible death of the wicked. For example, a Targum on Deuteronomy 33:6 reads: “Let Reuben live in this world and die not in the second death in which death the wicked die in the world to come.”²¹

Another Targum on Isaiah 65:6 is strikingly similar to Revelation 20:14 and 21:8.²² Speaking of the faithless Jews, it says: “Their punishment shall be in Gehenna where fire burns all the day . . . I will deliver their body to the second death.” These and similar examples from nonbiblical literature suggest that the phrase “second death” in Revelation means the final, irreversible cessation of existence of the wicked.

The Meaning of “Eternal.” Third, the New Testament references to “eternal punishment” (Matt 25:46), “eternal destruction” (2 Thess 1:9), “eternal fire” (Matt 25:41; Jude 7), and “eternal judgment” (Heb 6:2), do not necessarily mean a process that goes on forever. “Eternal” often refers to the *permanence of the result* rather than the *continuation of a process*. The English words “eternal,” “everlasting,” and “forever,” are used interchangeably to translate the Greek term *aionos* which comes from *aion* meaning literally “lasting for an age.”

The actual duration of *aionos* is determined by the context. For example, the fire by which the wicked are punished is said to be “eternal” (Matt 18:8; 25:41) or “unquenchable” (Matt 3:12). This can hardly mean that the wicked will be agonizing forever in the midst of inextinguishable fire. The latter is clear from Jude 7, which says that Sodom and Gomorrah suffered “a punishment of eternal fire.” Here “eternal—*aionou*” obviously means not never-ending but complete and permanent.

The same is true of the “eternal fire” that will punish the wicked. It is eternal in the sense that it will burn up completely and forever the last vestiges of sin and sinners. This is clearly indicated by the fact that the lake of fire is explicitly called “the second death” (Rev 20:14; 21:8), because, as noted earlier, it causes final, radical, and irreversible extinction of life.

The Context of “Eternal.” Following the principle stated above, the punishment of “eternal destruction” suffered by the wicked (2 Thess 1:9) can not signify a *process* that goes on forever but an act which brings about permanent *results*. Some reason that “if the word ‘eternal’ means without end when applied to the future blessedness of believers, it must follow, unless clear evidence is given to the contrary, that this word also means without end when used to describe the future punishment of the lost.”²³

Such reasoning fails to recognize that what determines the meaning of “eternal” is the object being qualified. If the object is the life granted by God to believers (John 3:16), then the word “eternal” obviously means “unending, everlasting,” because the Scripture tells us that the “mortal nature” of believers will be made “immortal” by Christ at His Coming (1 Cor 15:53).

On the other hand, if the object being qualified is the “punishment” or “destruction” of the lost, then “eternal” can only mean “permanent, total, final,” because nowhere does the Scripture teach that the wicked will be resurrected immortal to be able to suffer forever. Eternal punishment requires either the natural possession of an immortal nature, or the divine bestowal of an immortal nature at the time the punishment is inflicted. Nowhere does the Scripture teach that either of these conditions exists.

A Misrepresentation of Divine Justice. Fourth, eternal torment serves only the purpose of misrepresenting divine justice by making God appear a vindictive Being inflicting eternal agony upon those who sinned for the temporary duration of their lives. Some reason that if the wicked were to be punished by annihilation, “it would be a happy relief from punishment and therefore no punishment at all.”²⁴ Such reasoning is appalling, to say the least, since it implies that the only just punishment that God can inflict upon the unrighteous is the one that will torment them eternally.

It is hard to believe that divine justice can be satisfied only by inflicting a punishment of eternal torment. The human sense of justice regards the death penalty as the most severe form of punishment that can be imposed for capital offenses. There is no reason to believe that the divine sense of justice should be more exacting by demanding more than the actual annihilation of the unrighteous. This is not a denial of the principle of degrees of accountability

which, as noted earlier, will determine the “gradation” of the suffering of the lost. The punitive suffering, however, will not last forever but will terminate with the annihilation of the lost.

Eternal Cosmic Dualism. Fifth, eternal torment presupposes an eternal existence of a cosmic dualism. Heaven and hell, happiness and pain, good and evil, would continue to exist forever alongside each other. It is impossible to reconcile this view with the prophetic vision of the new world where there shall be no more “mourning nor crying nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away” (Rev 21:4). How could crying and pain be forgotten if the agony and anguish of the lost were at sight distance, as in the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31).

The presence of countless millions forever suffering excruciating torment, even if it were in the camp of the unsaved, could only serve to destroy the peace and happiness of the new world. Sinners would remain an eternal reality in God’s universe and God would never be “everything to every one” (1 Cor 15:28).

In the light of the above considerations we conclude that the outcome of the final judgment is not universal salvation for all, nor eternal punishment for the unsaved, but eternal life for the righteous and permanent annihilation for the unrighteous. This view provides a consistent interpretation of the Biblical references to the final judgment, and enhances our appreciation for God’s justice and mercy.

PART FOUR

THE THEOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE FINAL JUDGMENT

The study of the various aspects, phases, and outcome of the final judgment raises questions on its overall significance. What does this doctrine of the final judgment tell us about God’s nature, His relationship to the universe, the outcome of the conflict between good and evil, the value of human life and actions, our attitude toward God, and our view of ourselves? We will attempt to answer questions such as these by considering four major theological implications of the doctrine of the final judgment.

1. A Transcendent Moral Order

Security to our World. The final judgment points first of all to the existence of a transcendent moral order in the universe. It tells us that there is a supreme Moral Arbiter in this universe who is working out His eternal purposes. This message has tremendous significance in our time when the world seems out of control.

At a time when disorder, hate, immorality, wars, and senseless destruction of human life and property prevail, the message of the judgment reassures us that the eternal destiny of each individual and of the world as a whole is not in the hands of some mad, blind forces, but in the hands of our Almighty God. “He’s got the whole world in His Hands.” The scroll of human destiny rests safely in the hands of the Lamb (Rev 5:7).

The judgment conducted around God’s throne, in the presence of myriads of beings and on the basis of a perfect record of each individual, tells us that there is a moral order governing this universe, an order to which each individual is ultimately accountable. Those who think they have fooled everybody and every system will be surprised to discover that they never fooled God. The final judgment will disclose all their deeds and punish them accordingly.

Meaning to Human Existence. By pointing to a moral order that governs the universe, the doctrine of the final judgment gives meaning to our human existence. To be truly human means to express moral sensitivity, moral responsibility, and moral choices. This would not be possible if a moral order did not exist.

It would be frightening to live in a world where there was a total breakdown of the moral and civil order, where everyone was a law unto himself. The final judgment constantly reminds us that we cannot flaunt God’s moral principles with impunity because “we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive good or evil, according to what he has done in the body” (2 Cor 5:10).

The reality of the moral order attested by the final judgment makes all our actions, decisions, and choices significant because they have both immediate and ultimate consequences. The violation of moral principles cannot be ignored or taken lightly, because it represents an act of rebellion against God, the Moral Ruler of the universe. This rebellion results in separation from our only Source of being (Is 59:2) and in a process of self-destruction. The final judgment reveals God’s concern to terminate destructive rebellion in order to restore eternal security to the universe.

Substance to our Faith. The final judgment challenges us to substantiate our faith in God not only through words but also through deeds. It reminds us that our relation to God, the Moral Ruler of the Universe, is based not merely on the profession but on the practice of our faith. At the final judgment, Christ will invite into His kingdom “not every one who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ . . . but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven” (Matt 7:21).

“Works” are the criteria of the final judgment because, as noted earlier, they substantiate faith. Salvation is a divine gift that brings upon us a divine claim “to live sober, upright, and godly lives in this world, awaiting our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ” (Titus 2:12-13).

Seriousness to our Living. All of this means that the way we live our daily life is most important. The final judgment gives seriousness to our daily living. Our day-by-day round of thoughts, words, deeds, and attitudes counts for eternity. When the records will be examined in the final judgment, daily living will reveal what kind of persons we have been. Have we lived self-centered lives ignoring God’s moral principles, or God-centered lives reflecting His moral values?

Mankind needs to hear the message of the final judgment. When governor Felix invited Paul to speak to him, the Apostle used the opportunity to talk not about the social unrest in Palestine or the political situation in the Empire, but rather “about justice and self-control and future judgment” (Acts 24:25).

The three are interrelated because it is the final judgment that challenges a person to live justly and temperately. “Felix was alarmed” by such a challenge, but he chose to ignore it. Many today, like Felix, would rather not hear about the final judgment, preferring to live under the false assumption that they will never have to give account for their immoral and intemperate behavior.

Sobering Effect on Living. One day I asked a Capuchin monk—a classmate at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome—why some of their rosaries had a little skull attached to them. He replied: “To remind us constantly of death. When we think about death we are less apt to sin.” In Catholic theology, death is in a sense the time of judgment because it is at that moment that each person receives the eternal reward or punishment.

We disagree with the Catholic timing of the final judgment, but we wholeheartedly agree with the view that the thought of judgment can have a sobering effect on our living. Perhaps, instead of carrying a skull, we may wish to hang in a visible place the motto: “Remember the Final Judgment!” Such an awareness can constantly remind us of the seriousness of our living.

2. A Revelation of Individual Worth

God Views Each Person as Important. The fact that the apocalyptic description of the Pre-Advent and Post-Advent judgment mentions “books” where our “names,” thoughts, attitudes, and actions are recorded indicates that God places great value on each individual person. In a society where

people are often regarded as cogs in a machine, numbers in a computer, it is reassuring to know that God places a transcendent significance on our personal identity. He has written the name of each believer “before the foundation of the world in the book of life” (Rev 13:8).

A name in the Scripture often represents the character and personality of the person it designates (Ex 6:3; Acts 1:15; Rev 3:4). This means that God knows us not merely by our first name or family name, but He knows us as a total person and preserves a perfect record of the totality of our personality. In the sight of God, the meaning and destiny of our life is determined not by our church affiliation, our family lineage, or our racial belonging, but by the values and decisions which characterize our personality.

God Views Each Action as Important. The importance which God attaches to each person extends to the single decisions and actions. The final judgement teaches us that nothing we do is worthless or inconsequential in the sight of God. Even the “careless word” (Matt 12:36) is considered in the investigative phase of the final judgment. A reason is that careless, thoughtless talk is often a most accurate reflection of our inner self. Moreover, “idle talk” may sometimes have even a greater impact on others than “serious talk.” Thus, every thought, word, and action is potentially determinative of our destiny.

Moral Worth to Living. The far-reaching inclusiveness of the final judgment is awesome. Yet at the same time the thought that all we do, think, and say matters in God’s sight makes our life worth living. The fact that even the most insignificant action, such as the giving of a cup of cold water (Matt 10:42; 25:35-40), will not go unnoticed gives a sense of dignity, of importance to all that we do, think, and say.

Sometimes it seems that even our highest motives and best efforts are misunderstood. The judgment gives us courage to face human misunderstanding and criticism, reassuring us that God understands and takes notice of all our overt and covert actions. Nothing is ignored in the sight of God and everything will receive due consideration in the final judgment. In summary, to live without the consciousness of the final judgment means to be robbed of the sense of awfulness, grandeur, and moral worth this event gives to our life.

3. A Vindication of God’s Justice and Mercy

The Biblical concept of the final judgment defined in this chapter raises some vital questions: Why does the Scripture speak of a final judgment process through which God terminates the problem of sin in this universe? Does God need a judicial process to gather information necessary to execute a just universal judgment? Why does the Scripture mention heavenly and

human beings participating in a judicial process regarding the eternal destiny of moral beings? Seventh-day Adventists believe that the answers given to these questions are important because they can help us understand and appreciate God's final solution to the present conflict between good and evil.

God is not Seeking New Information. In the first place, it must be understood that the investigative phases of the final judgment are not intended to supply God with information which He does not already have. After all, God is the Author of the books which are used in His final judgment. The heavenly records represent not the acquisition on the part of God of new knowledge, but the revelation of old knowledge to moral intelligences.

One of the most telling evidences that God is not seeking new information through an investigative judgment is the Post-Advent judgment of the unsaved. This judgment, we noted, is designed to enable redeemed humanity to understand more fully God's justice in not saving the unrighteous. The very fact that the lost have no part in the first resurrection of believers (Rev 20:5) indicates that God has already decided their destiny.

Yet, before their final destruction at the end of the millennium, God offers redeemed humanity the opportunity to examine the record of their lives to understand the justice of His judgment. It is noteworthy that both before rewarding believers with eternal salvation and before punishing unbelievers with eternal destruction, God invites His moral creatures to evaluate the basis of His judgment.

God is not on Trial. In a sense the ones who are "on trial" in the investigative phases of the final judgment are not the saved or the unsaved, but God Himself. It is God's justice and mercy manifested in His decision to save some and condemn others that is being judged by moral intelligences. But why should God submit His judgments to the scrutiny of His created beings? Obviously, God is not morally obligated to go "on trial" before the universe. First, He has no moral debt toward His creatures. He has no confession to make as to possible defects in the making of the universe or of human beings. Nor has God any admission to make as to possible unfairness in His administration of the universe.

Second, God has no external obligation because He is the Sovereign Ruler who has freely created and redeemed His creatures. As He has freely created the universe, so He could freely dissolve it, starting all over again, without being in default toward anyone. Third, even if heavenly or human beings should find some fault in God's creation or administration—an absurd hypothesis—they could not dethrone God and enthrone another God in His place.

Whether the universe accepts or rejects the justice of God's government and judgments, this does not affect His Sovereignty. God would still be the Sovereign Ruler of the Universe. What is in jeopardy is not the eternal security of God but that of moral beings in the universe. Thus, fundamentally the one who is on trial is not God, but the moral universe. If the latter as a jury should find God, the Defendant, guilty of injustice, it is the jury and not the Defendant that would face a decisive punishment.

God is on Trial. There is a sense, however, in which God is "on trial" before His moral universe. For several reasons God is willing and expected to give an account of His creative, redemptive, and punitive activities. First, God has chosen to operate on the principle of freedom of choice. God has granted His moral creatures the freedom to choose between His love and justice and Satan's hostility and injustice. Not only has God granted this freedom of choice, but He also invites His moral beings to exercise this freedom by examining His moral principles and His judicial actions.

Second, God has chosen to operate on the principle of love and not of coercion. It was love that motivated God to create a universe of free moral beings who could be the recipients of His love and who could in perfect freedom reciprocate His love. It was love that motivated God to redeem mankind by entering into the limitations, suffering, and death of human flesh in order to provide moral beings with the greatest incentive to choose His love rather than Satan's hostility. It is love that motivates God to submit the records of His judgments to the scrutiny of the moral universe, so that His love and justice may be fully understood and accepted.

Judgment Deepens Trust in God. Love can render this universe eternally secure only if it becomes grounded on unquestionable *trust*.. An attitude of trust and loyalty cannot be demanded, it must be freely given. It is only when we have had occasion to see the integrity, fairness, and trustworthiness of a person that we develop an attitude of trust toward such a person. A vital function of the Pre- and Post-Advent judgment is to provide an opportunity to the moral beings of the universe to deepen their trust in God by verifying, validating, and vindicating the justice of His judgments.

Questions About God's Justice. The presence of evil and injustice on this planet raises questions regarding the validity of God's government. Why do innocent people suffer? Why is "truth" so often trampled down? How long will injustice, wickedness, and immorality prevail? Can God be just in saving some and destroying others? Questions such as these are raised in the Scripture. The Psalmist admits that it was "a wearisome task" for him to understand why the wicked "have no pangs" and "are not in trouble as other

men are” (Ps 73:16, 4, 5). These questions bothered him “until,” he says, “I went into the sanctuary of God; then I perceived their end” (Ps 73:17).

At the sanctuary, the Psalmist “perceived the end” of the wicked through the typological services performed there. He saw God offering atonement and salvation to penitent sinners and condemnation and destruction to the wicked. On the Day of Atonement, God judged penitent sinners by offering them full cleansing and restoration to covenant relationship while He judged impenitent sinners by punishing them with permanent destruction (Lev 23:29).

A similar picture is found in Daniel 8 where a heavenly being asks, “For how long is the vision concerning the continual burnt offering, the transgression that makes desolate, and the giving over of the sanctuary and host to be trampled under foot?” (Dan 8:13). God’s answer in this case is that after a prophetic period of 2300 days, the sanctuary, which is the center of God’s redemptive/judicial activity, will be “restored,” or “vindicated” or “made right” (Dan 8:14).

In Revelation also, those who “had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne,” are figuratively seen as asking with a loud, crying voice: “O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before thou wilt judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell upon the earth?” (Rev 6:9-10). God’s answer to these martyrs is to wait “a little longer” (Rev 6:11).

A Vindication of God’s Justice. God’s final answer to all the above troubling questions is given especially through the evaluative and executive phases of His final judgment. We have seen how numerous Scriptural passages speak of God’s inviting heavenly and human beings to participate in an evaluative judgment in order to verify the fairness and justice of His decisions regarding the salvation or perdition of each human being.

This verification will ultimately result in a deeper trust in God and a vindication of His righteousness. This trust is expressed by the redeemed—represented in Revelation as standing beside a sea of glass—singing: “Great and wonderful are thy deeds, O Lord God the Almighty! Just and true are they ways, O King of the ages! Who shall not fear and glorify they name, O Lord? For thou alone art holy. All nations shall come and worship thee, for they judgments have been revealed” (Rev 15:3-4).

It is noteworthy that the reason given for the universal acclamation of the greatness, justice, and truthfulness of God is the fact that His “judgments have been revealed” (Rev 15:4). Ellen G. White aptly comments in this regard: “Every question of truth and error in the long-standing controversy will then have been made plain. In the judgment of the universe, God will stand clear of blame for the existence or continuance of evil.”²⁵

A Vindication of God's People. This revelation of the justice of God's judgment is in a sense also a vindication of the redeemed. We have seen that in the vision of Daniel 7, the Ancient of Days is seen as pronouncing "judgment in favor of the saints of the Most High, and the time came when they possessed the kingdom" (Dan 7:22, NIV). Similarly, John the Revelator sees a great multitude in heaven crying: "Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, for his judgements are true and just; he has judged the great harlot who corrupted the earth with her fornication, and he has avenged on her the blood of his servants" (Rev 19:1-2).

It is noteworthy that the vindication of God and of His people is followed by the announcement that the marriage of the Lamb to His bride is about to take place (Rev 19:7). The metaphor of a wedding feast is used by Jesus Himself to describe the perfect union to be established at His Second Advent between Himself and His followers (Matt 22:1-14; 25:1-13; Mark 2:19; cf. Is 54:5-6; Jer 31:32).

Final Celebration. Paul also likens the relationship between Christ and His church to that of a husband to his wife (Eph 5:25ff), but the actual wedding is viewed as a future event when the church is presented before Christ "in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish" (Eph 5:27).

It is this eschatological celebration of the perfect union between Christ and His church that John sees as taking place after the judicial vindication of God and of His people. As God's vindication of His people on the Day of Atonement closed with celebrations and every 49 years with the inauguration of the Jubilee Year—a symbol of the ultimate restoration—so the antitypical vindication of God and of His people closes with the "marriage" celebration between Christ and the church and the final restoration of this earth (Rev 21:1-8).

4. A Basis for Hope and Confidence

Solemnity and Joy. The Biblical view of the final judgment as the decisive and final triumph of God's justice, manifested in the vindication and salvation of believers and in the condemnation and destruction of unbelievers, is an event to be anticipated with solemnity and joy. It is to be viewed with *solemnity* because it deals with the eternal destiny of moral beings which for the unrighteous will be eternal destruction. It is to be looked forward to with *joy* by believers because it represents for them their final vindication and salvation, the dawn of God's New World rather than the doom of their life.

The Pre-Advent judgment does not destroy our joy and assurance of salvation because it is not a scheme or retribution, but a revelation of our

standing before God as we are found to be in Christ. “Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect?” asks Paul. “It is God who justifies; who is to condemn?” (Rom 8:33-34). As our records are opened in the Pre-Advent judgment, we have nothing to fear because our Mediator stands for us. Essentially, this judgment is the outworking of the message of the Gospel which contains the Good News that God not only justifies penitent sinners in this present life, but also vindicates them on the day of His judgment by giving them the reward of eternal life.

Confidence and Hope. The close connection between the Gospel and the final judgment is clearly expressed by Paul when he speaks of the “day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus” (Rom 2:16). The judgment is according to the Gospel in the sense that it is part of the gracious provision of salvation through Jesus Christ who offers us both forgiveness of our sins in this present life and vindication of our forgiven sins in the final judgment. Thus the Christian can look forward to the final judgment, not with fear and despair but with confidence and hope.

John sees an evidence of the love of God being made perfect in us in the fact “that we may have confidence for the day of judgment” (1 John 4:17). This confidence rests on the assurance that Christ “is able to keep [us] from falling” in this present life and “to present [us] without blemish before the presence of his glory with rejoicing” on the Day of His judgment (Jude 24). It is also based on the assurance that “God is not so unjust as to overlook your work and the love which you showed for his sake” (Heb 6:10).

Human beings easily forget the good deeds done by others, but God preserves a remarkable and trustworthy record of every good deed, including the giving of a drink to a stranger (Matt 25:35). Thus, for God’s people, the final judgment, especially its Pre-Advent evaluative phase, represents the revelation of their faith and love for Christ and their vindication before the angelic host. It represents the coming of better days when Christ will ultimately reveal the truth about them.

5. Conclusion

The doctrine of the final judgment enshrines many vital truths. It points to the existence of a transcendent moral order and of a Moral Ruler. This gives meaning and seriousness to our daily living. It reveals that God places a great value on each person as well as on each of our decisions and actions. This gives a sense of accountability and moral worth to our living. It reassures us that God operates on the principle of love and freedom and that ultimately all the moral universe will be given the opportunity fully to understand and accept the justice and mercy of God. The vindication of God’s justice will result in the vindication of His people.

The final judgment guarantees that the conflict between good and evil will not last forever, but will be terminated by God in a final and decisive way. It helps us overcome a self-centered type of religion by reminding us that our eternal destiny is linked to the cosmic vindication and triumph of God's love and justice which will guarantee the eternal security, peace, and harmony of this universe and its inhabitants. Lastly, the final judgment inspires us to live godly lives with joy, confidence, and hope while "awaiting our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:13).

NOTES TO CHAPTER 14

1. Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy Between Christ and Satan* (Mountain View, California, 1950), p. 428.

2. Emphasis supplied.

3. William Barclay, *The Letters to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon* (Philadelphia, 1960), pp. 232-234.

4. Martin Dibelius and Hans Conzelman, *The Pastoral Epistles* (Philadelphia, 1972), p. 120.

5. J. A. Seiss, *The Apocalypse* (Philadelphia, n.d.), p. 18.

6. John A. Bollier, "Judgment in the Apocalypse," *Interpretation* (January, 1953), p. 18.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 20.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 22.

9. The Aramaic of Daniel 7:22 can be understood as meaning either that the judgment concerns the saints or that the saints themselves will do the judging. Though the latter option has Biblical support (cf. Matt 19:28; Rev 20:4; 1 Cor 6:1-2), the former understanding is preferable because the context clearly speaks of God's activity against the persecuting power and in favor of the saints. As in the historical chapters (1 to 6) Daniel and his friends are so severely tested and rewarded by God for their faithfulness, so in the apocalyptic chapters the saints are persecuted but ultimately rewarded with eternal kingship because of their loyalty to God.

10. See, for example, S. R. Driver, *Daniel* (London, 1900), p. 133; A. Bentzen, *Daniel* (Tübingen, 1952), p. 66.

11. For a scholarly discussion on the relationship between the prophecies of Daniel 8 and 9, see William H. Shea, *Selected Studies on Prophetic Interpretation* (Lincoln, Nebraska, 1982); also by the same author, "The Relationship Between the Prophecies of Daniel 8 and Daniel 9," in *The Sanctuary and the Atonement*, eds. Arnold V. Wallenkampf and W. Richard Leshar (Washington, D.C., 1981), pp. 228-250.

12. The saying is attributed to Rabbi Neir. See G. Foot Moore, *Judaism II* (New York, 1958), p. 62.

13. On the scapegoat rite see Gerhard F. Hasel, "Studies in Biblical Atonement II: The Day of Atonement," in *The Sanctuary and the Atonement* (n. 11), pp. 121-123.

14. Emphasis supplied.

15. Emphasis supplied.

16. Austin M. Farrer, *The Revelation of St. John the Divine* (Oxford, 1964), p. 210.

17. George Eldon Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John* (Grand Rapids, 1979), p. 267.

18. Jacques Ellul, *Apocalypse, The Book of Revelation* (New York, 1977), p. 212.

19. Emphasis supplied.

20. Stephen Travis, *I Believe in the Second Coming of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, 1982), p. 198.

21. These and other examples from the Targum are cited by J. Massyngberde Ford, *Revelation, Introduction, Translation and Commentary* (New York, 1975), p. 393.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 394.

23. Anthony A. Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future* (Grand Rapids, 1979), p. 270.

24. H. Buis, "Everlasting Punishment," *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, 1978), vol. 4, p. 956.

25. Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, California, 1940), p. 58.

Chapter 15

THE CONSUMMATION OF THE ADVENT HOPE

Our generation has witnessed the most spectacular and sensational human exploits. We have seen men walking on the moon, spacecraft relaying breathtaking close-up pictures of our distant planets, atomic bombs unleashing incredible power and destruction, jets breaking the sound barrier, and astronauts floating in space, to name but a few recent accomplishments. Nevertheless, the most stupendous audiovisual “extravaganza” is yet to be witnessed, namely, the glorious and majestic Return of Jesus Christ to this earth.

Christ’s glorious Return represents the consummation of the Christian Hope. While in pagan religions salvation was often conceived as a human ascension toward God, in Biblical faith, as noted in chapter 1, salvation is realized through a divine descent toward mankind. In other words, the Christian hope rests not on an inherent human capacity to *go up* to God but on God’s revelation of His willingness to *come down* to our planet to restore our world to its original perfection.

In the preceding chapters we saw the fundamental importance the Scripture attributes to the Second Advent. It is regarded as the final coming of the Lord to consummate the redemptive work He began at His incarnation. We noted also that the unprecedented fulfillment in our time of the Advent signs is reassuring us not only of the certainty but also of the imminence of our Lord’s Return.

Objective of Chapter. This chapter examines the Biblical portrayal of Christ’s Return and focuses specifically on the *manner*, the *purpose*, and the *outcome* of His Coming. Each of these three aspects of the Second Advent will be examined successively in the order given.

PART ONE

THE MANNER OF CHRIST'S COMING

When we think realistically about our Lord's Return, we naturally wonder how it will take place. The answer the New Testament provides contains several elements which we shall briefly consider.

1. Personal Coming

Personal as Christ's Ascension. First of all the New Testament teaches that Christ's Return will be decidedly a *personal* Coming. The disciples who were gazing at their ascending Lord were reassured by two "men" who in fact were angels sent by God, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11).

This passage makes it abundantly clear that the resurrected Lord who ascended to heaven in person will in like manner return to this earth. His future Coming to this earth will be as personal as His departure. This clear teaching is rejected by many liberal theologians who do not believe in the physical resurrection of Christ. By denying that Jesus arose bodily out of the grave, they cannot believe either that Christ personally ascended to heaven, nor that He will personally return to this earth.

No Invisible, Spiritual Return. Liberal scholars interpret spiritually both the ascension and the Second Advent. In their view the ascension was merely a visionary representation of Christ's higher level of existence. Similarly the references to Christ's Return are interpreted as a greater manifestation of His spiritual power in this world. Thus Christ is not returning personally to this earth, but will exert an ever-increasing spiritual influence upon mankind.

The spiritualization of the Second Advent does injustice to the many explicit descriptions of His personal Return as found in the New Testament. Paul, for example, says in Philippians 3:20, 21: "we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will change our lowly body to be like his glorious body." Again in 1 Thessalonians 4:16, the Apostle says": "For the Lord *himself* will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the archangel's call, and with the sound of the trumpet of God" (cf. Col 3:4; 1 Cor 15:22; Titus 2:13).¹

The cited passages and many others clearly negate the spiritual interpretation of Christ's Return. It is "the Lord *himself*" who "will descend from heaven," not His power. Moreover, the terrible happenings of our time hardly bespeak an increasing manifestation of Christ's spiritual influence in this

world. We must not allow these vagaries to undermine our confidence in the personal and real Coming of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

2. Visible Coming

Implied in the Terms “Coming, Appearing.” Intimately connected to the personal and physical aspect of Christ’s Coming is its *visible* character. The latter is inherent in the two words chiefly used to describe it, namely, *parousia*—Coming, and *epiphaneia*—appearing. These terms describe not an inward, invisible spiritual experience but a real meeting with a visible person.

Hebrews explains that as Christ “has appeared once for all at the end of the age to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself . . . so Christ, . . . will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him” (Heb 9:26, 28). The comparison suggests that the second appearing will be as visible as the first.

Compared to “Lightning.” Jesus Himself left no doubt whatsoever as to the visibility of His Return. He warned His disciples against the deception of a secret Second Advent by comparing it to the visibility of the lightning which “comes from the east and shines as far as the west” (Matt 24:26-27). Christ added: “Then will appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and *they will see* the Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory” (Matt 24:30).²

The same truth is emphatically expressed in majestic language in Revelation 1:7: “Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and *every eye will see him*, every one who pierced him; and all the tribes of the earth will wail on account of him.”³ The simple grandeur of these words attests to a personal Coming of Christ which will be universally visible to every human being.

No Secret Coming. The notion of an invisible Coming of Christ, perceived only through the eye of faith, as taught by Jehovah’s Witnesses, as well as the idea of a secret Coming of Christ to rapture away the living souls from the earth, as held by many dispensationalists, is foreign to Biblical thought. The New Testament leaves us in no doubt whatever as to the visibility of Christ’s Return. John points to this fact as the assurance of our ultimate transformation: “We know that when he appears we shall be like him for *we shall see him* as he is” (1 John 3:2).⁴

3. Sudden Coming

Unexpected Like the Flood. Christ’s Return will be not only personal and visible, but also sudden, unexpected, taking people by surprise. To illustrate the suddenness of His Coming, Christ compared it to the unexpected destruction by the Flood: “For as in those days before

the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, . . . so will be the coming of the Son of man” (Matt 24:38-39).

Unexpected Like a Thief. Another metaphor used by Christ to illustrate the sudden and unanticipated manner of His Return is the unexpected breaking in of a thief: “If the householder had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have watched and would not have let his house be broken into” (Matt 24:43). This metaphor became well known in apostolic times, for Paul writes to the Thessalonians: “You yourself know well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night” (1 Thess 5:2). Because of the sudden and unexpected manner of Christ’s Return, both Christ and Paul urge constant readiness: “Therefore you also must be ready; for the Son of man is coming at an hour you do not expect” (Matt 24:44). “So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober” (1 Thess 5:6).

Ellen White aptly comments that Christ “distinctly states the suddenness of His coming. He does not measure time, lest we shall neglect a momentary preparation, and in our indolence look ahead to the time when we think He will come, and defer the preparation. ‘Watch ye therefore: for ye know not.’ Yet this foretold uncertainty, and suddenness at last, fails to rouse us from stupidity to earnest wakefulness, and to quicken our watchfulness for our expected Master.”⁵

Not Contradicted by Advent Signs. The suddenness of Christ’s Return is not contradicted by the fulfillment of the Advent signs, because, as we have seen in chapter 7, their function is not to indicate the exact time of the Second Advent, but rather to encourage constant preparation. Because of their generic nature, the Advent signs have found a degree of fulfillment in every age, thus nourishing the Advent hope of many believers throughout history. The unprecedented fulfillment of the Advent signs in our time is challenging us to be actively engaged, not in seeking for profit, pleasure, power, and worldly honor, but in doing our Lord’s business. “Blessed is that servant whom his master when he comes will find so doing” (Matt 24:46).

4. Glorious and Triumphant Coming

Contrast to Humble First Advent. In various ways the Bible portrays Christ’s Coming as transcendently glorious and triumphant. At His First Advent Christ fulfilled the prophecy regarding the Servant of the Lord who “will not cry or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street” (Is 42:2; cf. Matt 12:19). Indeed, during His ministry Jesus repeatedly instructed His followers not to make Him known (Mark 8:30; 9:9).

In dramatic contrast to His First Coming when Christ entered our world as a helpless baby in an obscure village, He will return as the Conqueror, with the power and glory of God. Every creature will be compelled to confess: Thou art Lord and Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever.

Jesus Himself describes His Second Coming as a visible and universal manifestation of His power and glory. “For the Son of man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay every man for what he has done” (Matt 16:27). Paul echoes in part Christ’s word in his description of the Second Advent: “For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the archangel’s call, and with the sound of the trumpet of God” (1 Thess 4:16; cf. Col 3:4; Titus 2:13).

John the Revelator portrays in a most dramatic way the glory of Christ’s Return, by comparing it to the Coming of a Rider on a white horse, dazzling with glory, followed by the armies of heaven “arrayed in fine linen, white and pure,” and with the name “King of kings and Lord of lords” inscribed “on his robe and on his thigh” (Rev 19:11-16).

Dimensions of Christ’s Glory. The glory attending Christ’s Return will be evident in different ways. First, in the supernatural splendor of *Christ’s appearance*. At Christ’s first Coming there was little evidence of His supernatural glory. At His Second Advent it will be different. Christ’s supernatural glory will be fully revealed. John the Revelator was shown in vision glimpses of the glorified Christ (Rev 1:12-18; 19:11-16).

Christ’s glory will be manifested also in *the glorification of the Church*. In referring to the final resurrection Daniel writes: “And those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament; and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever” (Dan 12:3). These words find echo in Christ’s statement at the conclusion of the parable of the wheat and the tares: “Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father” (Matt 13:43).

Lastly, the glory of Christ’s Coming will be manifested in *His final mighty acts*. These will include the resurrections of the saved and the unsaved, the final judgment, the destruction of the wicked, and the restoration of this present world.

5. Coming on the Clouds

References to Clouds. Perhaps the most effective imagery used in the Bible to portray the glory and majesty of Christ’s Coming, is that of His “coming on the clouds.” Jesus Himself used this imagery when He spoke of

His Return. To His disciples who asked Him about the manner of His Coming, Christ replied: “Then will appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of man *coming on the clouds of heaven* with power and great glory” (Matt 24:30). During His interrogation by the high priest, Christ declared: “I tell you, hereafter you will see the Son of man seated at the right hand of Power, and *coming on the clouds of heaven*” (Matt 26:64).

The same language is used in the book of Revelation: “Behold, he is *coming with the clouds*, and every eye will see him” (Rev 1:7). The origin of this description can be traced back to Old Testament prophets, especially to Daniel, who writes: “I saw in the night visions, and behold, *with the clouds of heaven there came on like a son of man*, . . . and to him was given dominion and glory and kingdom” (Dan 7:13-14; cf. Joel 2:2; Zeph 1:14-18).

Real or Symbolic Clouds? Why is Christ’s Return associated with clouds? Are they real or symbolic of heavenly glory? Some dismiss the reference to the clouds as simple metaphorical imagery. Such a view ignores that God has manifested Himself through literal clouds in the past. He spoke through “a think cloud” on Mount Sinai (Ex 19:11, 16) and He manifested His glory in the form of a real cloud which rested upon the mountain (Ex 24:15-16). God also led the Israelites through their wilderness journey by a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night (Ex 13:21, 22; Ps 78:14; 105:39).

The cloud covered the tabernacle whenever God manifested His presence there (Ex 40:34; Num 9:15-23). The past manifestations of God’s glorious presence through means of real clouds give us reason to believe that Christ’s Return will be accompanied by splendid clouds.

The rich meaning of “the clouds” in Biblical history suggests, however, that the reference to Christ’s “coming on the clouds” has a deeper message to convey. Three concepts deserve mentioning.

Power and Glory. The Coming of Christ on the clouds suggests first of all that it will be a unique visible manifestation of divine power and glory. Since the clouds are the chariots of God’s glory (Ps 104:3) and are used by God to diffuse His glorious presence (Ex 24:14-15), they fittingly express the majesty and splendor that will accompany Christ’s Return.

The fact that luminous clouds will be seen “from one end of heaven to the other” (Matt 24:31) suggests that Christ’s Return marks a decisive event in redemptive history, namely, the consummation of redemption and the establishment of God’s Kingdom. In the radiance of the Advent clouds the glory of the ages will be manifested for all to see.⁶

Reward and Retribution. The Coming of Christ on the clouds suggests also that through Christ's Coming God will fulfill His promise to reward the faithful and punish the unfaithful. The covenant that God established with Noah after the Flood by setting a rainbow "in the cloud" (Gen 9:13), and the guidance that God promised through the cloud to His people journeying through the wilderness, will be ultimately fulfilled when the Advent clouds appear and believers will reach the end of their pilgrimage as their Savior welcomes them into the Promised Land of enduring rest.

The Advent clouds, however, spell not only hope for the believers but also doom for the unbelievers. The prophets describe the retribution of the great day of the Lord as "a day of clouds and thick darkness" (Zeph 1:15; Joel 2:2). For those who have scorned God's will, the Advent clouds are ominous of punishment and death. From the first exodus to the last, the clouds in the Bible contain both a promise of protection for the faithful and a warning of punishment for the unfaithful.

Joyful Reunion. The Coming of the Lord on the clouds points also to the happy reunion with Christ and with believers of all ages. Paul explains that both the resurrected and the transformed saints will be caught up together "in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air; and so we shall always be with the Lord" (1 Thess 4:16-17).

In this passage the clouds are seen as the abiding place for the rendezvous with the Lord and with the believers of all the ages. Just as the Israelites experienced divine presence and power by living "under the cloud" and by being baptized "in the cloud" (1 Cor 10:1-5), so the redeemed will experience Christ's presence and power at the grand rendezvous in the clouds of Christ's glorious Return. Here the Advent clouds become the place of transfiguration for all believers, the place where the eternal fellowship of the believers begins.

Conclusion. In light of the foregoing considerations we conclude that Christ will return in a *personal, visible, sudden, glorious, and triumphant* manner. These characterizations of the manner of Christ's Coming must be regarded as feeble attempts to describe the most breathtaking event human beings will ever see.

PART TWO

THE PURPOSE OF CHRIST'S COMING

Completion of Redemption. Why is it necessary for Christ to return? The basic answer is, to complete the redemptive work begun at His incarnation. God's conquest of the powers of evil is accomplished through two great events or visitations: the Incarnation and the Second Advent. Oscar

Cullmann illustrates this two-step victory by the analogy of the Allies' victory over Nazi Germany.⁷ The two steps in that victory are known as D-Day and V-Day. D-Day is the successful landing of Allied armies on the beachheads of Normandy which turned the tide of the war. Though there was still much bitter fighting before the final capitulation of the German army, the decisive blow had been inflicted and the tide of the war had turned. V-Day represented the formal surrender of the German army with the accompanying victory celebrations.

Two-Step Victory. Christ through His victorious life, death, and resurrection inflicted a decisive blow to the realm of Satan (D-Day). As Paul puts it, "He disarmed the principalities and powers and made a public example of them, triumphing over them" (Col 2:15). Since Pentecost the Gospel of God's Kingdom has been preached around the world and ever-increasing numbers of persons have been delivered from Satan's domain and have become members of Christ's Kingdom.

Though Satan has suffered a decisive defeat, he is by no means destroyed. His evil powers are still very much with us. Hate, violence, crime, persecution, and wars are still a painful daily reality. Thus it is necessary for Christ to return to "put all his enemies under his feet [V-Day]. The last enemy to be destroyed is death" (1 Cor 15:25-26).

Universal Lordship. The enemies of God's Kingdom are spiritual enemies who influence human minds and actions. The final victory against these demonic powers can only be won by a direct divine intervention. The purpose of Christ's Return is for Him to reveal His hidden power by destroying all forms of evil and evildoers and establishing His everlasting Kingdom of peace and righteousness.

At present Christ reigns over a spiritual Kingdom. His Lordship is confessed and accepted only by believers. At the Second Advent Christ's Lordship will become visible and accepted universally. When we pray today, "Thy kingdom come," we are actually praying for the establishment of Christ's universal Kingdom on this earth at His Second Advent. At that time "at the name of Jesus every knee [will] bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue [will] confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil 2:10-11).

To appreciate how Christ will establish His eternal Kingdom at His Return, brief consideration will now be given to the following four events that will take place in connection with the Second Advent:

- (1) The Gathering of the Redeemed
- (2) The Resurrections of Believers and of Unbelievers
- (3) The Final Judgment
- (4) The Restoration of this World

1. The Gathering of the Redeemed

Universal Gathering. On repeated occasions during His ministry, Christ announced that the primary purpose of His Return would be to gather all His redeemed children unto Himself (Matt 24:31; 25:32-34), so that, Jesus said, “where I am you may be also” (John 14:3). The fact that Christ cares so much for our company to desire to return should make our hearts leap with joy at the thought of being with Him. Christ’s Return is so intimately connected with the gathering of the redeemed that Paul can speak in one breath of “the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him” (2 Thess 2:1, NIV).

No Believer Left Out. It is hard to imagine what a grand gathering that will be when the redeemed of all the ages will be assembled together around the Savior. As Christ sent forth His followers to witness “to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8), so He will send forth His angels to “gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven” (Mark 13:27). No believer will be left out. At the visit of a Head of State only a few persons can be part of the welcoming party. At the Coming of Christ every believer who ever lived, whether young or old, educated or uneducated, rich or poor, black or white, will participate in the grand Advent celebration.

2. The Resurrections of Believers and of Unbelievers

The Resurrection of the Believers. The universal gathering of all the believers will be made possible at Christ’s Return as the result of two major events: The resurrection of the sleeping saints and the transformation of the living saints. The latter is generally known as “translation.” Such a usage is not quite correct, since both the sleeping and the living saints will be translated, that is, transferred from this earth to heaven. Nevertheless we shall use the term “translation” according to the accepted theological usage, namely, as designating the transformation of the living saints.

The resurrection and translation of all the believers are clearly placed in the Scripture at the time of Christ’s Return, sometimes called “the last day” (John 6:39-40, 44, 54). Paul, for example, explains that “as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ” (1 Cor 15:22-23; cf. Phil 3:20-21; 1 Thess 4:16).

Paul clearly explains that both the resurrection of all the sleeping saints and the translation of all living believers will take place at the same time in conjunction with Christ's Coming: "For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the archangel's call, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first; then we who are alive, who are left, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air; and so we shall always be with the Lord" (1 Thess 4:16-17).

One Resurrection of Believers. Some dispensationalists interpret the phrase "the dead in Christ will rise *first*:" as meaning that *first* there will be a resurrection of New Testament believers who will be raptured away secretly before the final seven-year Tribulation and *then* after the Tribulation there will be a resurrection of the Old Testament believers, of the tribulation saints and of the unbelievers.⁸ This interpretation clearly misinterprets the Pauline passage. Even a cursory reading of this passage reveals that Paul is not contrasting the resurrection of Old Testament believers with that of New Testament believers, but rather the resurrection of the dead in Christ with the rapture of living believers. "First" simply means here that the sleeping saints are raised first, that is, before the living saints are caught up to be with the Lord.

The same sequence is suggested by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:52: "For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed." Paul's concern in both passages is to reassure his readers that believers who are alive at the time of Christ's Return will have no advantage over those believers who are asleep. The reason is that transformed, living believers "shall be caught up together with them [resurrected saints] in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air" (1 Thess 4:17). In other words, all believers will be present at the grand Advent gathering, both the resurrected saints of all ages and the transformed living saints.

The Resurrection of Unbelievers. What about the unbelievers? Will they also be resurrected, and if so, when? Paul in his epistles makes no reference to the resurrection of the unbelievers, though he is quoted in Acts 24:15 as saying that "there will be a resurrection of both the just and the unjust." The reason for Paul's silence is simply that the resurrection of unbelievers was not an issue which he needed to address in his correspondence. However, the Bible is not silent on this point. The most explicit Old Testament reference to the resurrection of both believers and unbelievers is found in Daniel 12:2: "And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt."

In the New Testament the resurrection of both believers and unbelievers is presupposed in some of the Kingdom parables which speak of a final general separation of the evildoers from the righteous (Matt 13:41-43, 49-50; 25:31-46). The most explicit statement is found in the Gospel of John where Jesus says: “Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out—those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned” (John 5:28-29, NIV).

All three cited texts (Acts 24:15; Dan 12:2; John 4:28-29) seem to suggest that the resurrection of both the righteous and the unrighteous will take place contemporaneously. However, Revelation 20 clearly indicates that there will be two separate resurrections. The resurrection of the believers occurs first, at the victorious Second Coming of Christ, and issues in life: “Blessed and holy is he who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and they shall reign with him a thousand years” (Rev 20:6). The second resurrection, that of the unbelievers, takes place at the end of the millennium and results in condemnation and the second death: “If any one’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.” “This is the second death” (Rev 20:14-15).⁹

Fact More Important than Phases. To a critical modern reader there is an open contradiction between those passages which speak of one general resurrection of believers and unbelievers and Revelation’s reference to two resurrections, separated by one thousand years. This apparent contradiction did not disturb Bible writers because for them the *reality* of the resurrection was more important than its *modality*. This is why most of the references to the resurrection mention its *fact* rather than its *phases*.

We have found that the same principle applies to the final judgment where most of the Biblical references emphasize its reality and finality rather than its phases. Yet we have seen that there are Biblical passages which implicitly suggest a Pre-Advent and a Post-Advent phase of the final judgment.

In light of this fact the Seventh-day Adventist Church, contrary to several other churches, accepts as real the distinction found in Revelation 20 between the resurrection of believers and that of unbelievers. We recognize, however, that Scripture is silent regarding the nature of the resurrection of the wicked and their mode of existence before their final destruction. Thus, it is of no virtue to speculate regarding that which the Scripture has not revealed.

Two Distinct Resurrections. The belief in two distinct resurrections, as held by Seventh-day Adventists, is a rather unique brand of premillennialism. We believe that the resurrection of *all* the righteous dead and the translation

of *all* the righteous living will take place contemporaneously at the beginning of the millennium when Christ returns personally, visibly, and gloriously. The wicked living at that time will be destroyed while those wicked who are dead will remain in their graves until the second resurrection at the end of the millennium.

During the millennium the redeemed will be in heaven while Satan will be isolated on this earth that will remain depopulated. At the close of the millennium the wicked dead will be resurrected. This event will enable Satan to make one final attempt to gain control of this world as the redeemed descent to this earth. God, however, will execute His judgment upon the wicked by destroying them forever (second death—Rev 20:13-15). Afterwards God will recreate this earth and the redeemed will dwell in it securely forever.

When compared with other views, the Seventh-day Adventist interpretation is less confusing and more consistent with Scripture. There are not three or four resurrections, as held by some dispensationalists, but only two: one for the righteous and one for the unrighteous. This means that all the redeemed are resurrected and rewarded at the same time and similarly all the wicked are resurrected and punished at the same time.¹⁰ There is no confusion as to who lives on earth and who in heaven during the millennium. There is no division between a millennial Jewish kingdom on this earth and a Christian kingdom in heaven, but one Kingdom of God consisting of believers of all ages.

The Resurrection of the Body

Objections to the Resurrection of the Body. What kind of body will believers receive at the resurrection or translation? Will it be a material or a spiritual body? Will it be similar to or radically different from the present one? How will our personal identity be preserved? Will my father be 73 years old and my mother 71? Before attempting to answer these question about the nature of the resurrection body, it is well briefly to mention the two main objections which have been raised against the doctrine of the resurrection of the body. These stem on one hand from philosophical idealism and on the other hand from “scientific” materialism.

Philosophical Idealism. Greek philosophical idealism viewed material existence as evil and thus to be done away with. Salvation was seen as the liberation of the soul from the prison-house of the body. This philosophical dualism has greatly influenced Christian thought to the extent that many Christians today reject the doctrine of the resurrection of the body, because it would continue material existence which is viewed as evil. Thus they believe that at the resurrection the redeemed will receive not physical but spiritual nonmaterial bodies.

The basic fallacy of this view is that it is based on the false assumption that matter is evil and must be destroyed. This view is clearly discredited by the Scriptural passages which teach that matter, including the human body, is God's good creation (Gen 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31). The Psalmist declares: "For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made" (Ps 139:13-14, NIV).

"Scientific" Materialism. "Scientific" materialism views matter as the only ultimate reality. Since we live in a material body, which is viewed as the product of chance rather than of choice, when we die it is the end. Those Christians who are influenced by this view reject any notion of the resurrection of the body. They believe that the only immortality is the influence we have exerted on others and the hereditary characteristics we have transmitted to our posterity.

Such a view negates not only the teaching of the Bible but also the basic longing of most human beings. In our age of subatomic science it is not incredible to believe that the same God who brought our world into existence still continues to control its infinitesimal particles. To believe in the resurrection of the body means to believe that God is still in control of all things, including our total being.

The Fact of the Resurrection. Christian belief in the resurrection of the body did not arise from philosophical speculations or wishful thinking like the notion of the immortality of the soul. It arose from the conviction that such an event had actually already happened with the resurrection of Christ from the dead. Since the Son of Man is the representative of *all* men, what happened to Him is the clue to what is going to happen to every believer. Because Christ rose bodily from the grave we have reason to believe that we too shall rise in a similar fashion.

Jesus is rightly called "the firstborn from the dead" (Col 1:18) because, as George Eldon Ladd aptly expresses it, "he stand at the head of a new order of existence—resurrection life."¹¹ The fact of Christ's resurrection has made the believers' resurrection a certainty, because Christ has proved His victory over death. The eschatological character of Jesus' resurrection is evident in Paul's statement that His resurrection was "the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep" (1 Cor 15:20).

The expression "first fruits" has little meaning for today's urban dwellers. In Bible times, however, it had a rich meaning because it referred to the first produce of the harvest which was offered in sacrifice to God to express gratitude for grating a new harvest. Thus the first fruits which were brought

to the Temple were seen not as mere hope of a new harvest but as its actual beginning. Christ's resurrection then is "the first fruits" in the sense that it has made the resurrection of believers not a mere possibility but a certainty.

In 1 Corinthians 15, the chapter which offers the fullest treatment of the resurrection of the body found anywhere in the Bible, Paul emphatically explains how much our resurrection depends upon that of Christ: "If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. We are even found to be misrepresenting God, . . . If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished" (1 Cor 15:14, 17-18). This is an astonishing statement. To deny Christ's resurrection means to destroy our faith in God and in His promise to raise us at Christ's Return. The reason for this is simple. It is through His resurrection that Christ proved to have vanquished death for all his followers.

The Nature of the Resurrection Body. What kind of body will Christ give at His Return to the sleeping and living saints? We are rather fortunate to have Paul's discussion of this very question which had been raised by the Corinthians: "But some one will ask, 'How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?' You foolish man! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. And what you sow is not the body which is to be, but a bare kernel, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain. But God gives it a body as he has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body" (1 Cor 15:35-38).

By means of analogy of the seed, Paul explains the continuity and discontinuity that exist between our present physical body and the future resurrection/translation body. The continuity is established by the connection between the seed and the new plant that sprouts out of it. The discontinuity is to be seen in the difference between the seed that is sown and the new plant that comes from it. What Paul is saying here is that as God gives a body to each kind of seed that is sown, so God will give a body to each person who is buried. The fact that deceased bodies are buried like the seed in the ground may have suggested to Paul the analogy of the seed.

Paul develops further the analogy of sowing and reaping to give the nearest thing to a description of the resurrection body to be found in the Bible: "So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body" (1 Cor 15:42-44).

Characteristics of the Resurrection Body

Four Contrasts. In 1 Corinthians 15:42-44 Paul explains the difference between our present body and the resurrection body by means of four contrasts. These contrasts are equally applicable to the bodies of the living saints who will be transformed and translated at Christ's Return without seeing death. First, our present bodies are *perishable* (*phthora*)—subject to sickness and death—but our resurrection bodies will be *imperishable* (*aphtharsia*)—no longer liable to sickness and death. Second, our present bodies experience the *dishonor* of being lowered into a grave, but our resurrection bodies will experience the *glory* of an inner and outward transformation.

Third, our present bodies are *weak*, as they become easily tired and exhausted, but our resurrection bodies will be full of *power*, with boundless energy to accomplish all our goals. Fourth, our present bodies are *physical* (*some psychikon*), but our resurrection bodies will be *spiritual* (*soma pneumatikon*). This last contrast has led many to believe that our resurrection/translation bodies will be “spiritual” in the sense that they will be devoid of the present physical substance. In other words, “spiritual” is understood as the opposite of physical. Thus the resurrection/translation bodies allegedly consist of a nonphysical, nonmaterial substance, whatever that may be.

A “Spiritual” Resurrected Body. Did Paul believe and does the Bible teach that at the Second Advent living and dead believers will receive nonmaterial and nonphysical bodies totally devoid of physical substance? It must be admitted that Paul's language in this passage, if it is not examined in the larger context of his writings, can lead a reader to a nonmaterial view of the resurrection body. Such a view, however, is discredited first of all by the comparison which Paul himself makes between Christ's resurrection and that of the believer (Col 1:18; 1 Cor 15:20).

If Christ is the “first fruits of those who have fallen asleep” (1 Cor 15:20), then resurrected believers will have bodies similar to that of Christ. The comparison cannot be pressed too far in view of the fact that at His resurrection Christ resumed also those divine qualities which He had temporarily laid aside during His Incarnation (Phil 2:7). Yet the fact remains that Christ's resurrection body was certainly physical since He was touched (John 20:17, 27) and He ate food (Luke 24:38-43).

More telling is Paul's use of the same two words (*natural-psychikos*/*spiritual-pneumatikos*) in the same epistle: “The unspiritual [*natural-psychikos*] man does not receive the gifts of the Spirit of God, for they are folly

to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. The *spiritual* [*pneumatikos*] man judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one” (1 Cor 2:14-15).¹²

It is obvious that the spiritual man in this passage does not mean a nonphysical person. Rather it is someone who is guided by the Holy Spirit, in contradistinction from someone who is guided by natural impulses. Similarly, the present natural body described in 1 Corinthians 15:44 is one which is subject to the law of sin and death, while the future resurrection body is one which will be directed by the Holy Spirit. Thus the resurrection body is called “spiritual” because it is ruled not by carnal impulses but by the Holy Spirit.

Spirit Led. This insight helps us to understand also Paul’s statement a few verses later: “Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable” (1 Cor 15:50). It is evident that here also Paul is not trying to say that the resurrection body will be nonphysical, because, writing to the Romans, he says: “But you are not in the flesh, you are in the Spirit, if the Spirit of God really dwells in you” (Rom 8:9).

By the phrase “not in the flesh” Paul obviously did not mean that Christians who were led by the Spirit had already discarded their physical bodies. Rather, he means that they were guided by spiritual and not worldly values (Rom 8:4-8). If Paul could speak of Christians as not being “in the flesh” already in the present life, his reference to the absence of “flesh and blood” in the Kingdom of God cannot mean the absence of physical bodies. It simply means the absence of the natural, carnal limitations and sinful inclinations of the present life, because the redeemed will be fully led by the Spirit.

Physical Body is not Evil. If God at the Second Advent were to change our present physical bodies into bodies consisting of nonphysical and nonmaterial substance, then, as Anthony A. Hoekema perceptively points out, “the devil would have won a great victory since God would then have been compelled to change human beings with physical bodies such as he had created into creatures of a different sort, without physical bodies (like the angels). Then it would indeed seem that matter had become intrinsically evil so that it had to be banished. And then, in a sense, the Greek philosophers would have been proved right. But matter is not evil; it is part of God’s good creation.”¹³

In the creation story seven times God expresses His satisfaction over the perfection of His material creation by saying “it was good” (Gen 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31), and then on the seventh day He rested to celebrate the completion of His perfect creation (Gen 2:1-3). To celebrate the good news

of His perfect creation, complete redemption, and final restoration of this world, God gave the Sabbath to the human family (Ex 20:11; Deut 5:15; Luke 4:16-21; 13:10-13; Heb 4:9). As a Seventh-day Sabbathkeeper who celebrates on and through the Sabbath these marvelous glad tidings, it is impossible for me to conceive that God will ultimately change radically the structure and composition of the human body.

Change Implies Imperfection. If the resurrection/translation body was to be radically different from the original creation body, then God would be admitting that His original design of the human body was not really perfect after all. He would be admitting that His original model of male and female physical beings did not, contrary to what the Scripture says, adequately reflect “his [God’s] own image” (Gen 1:27). To remedy the problem then God would be compelled to create a new type of human beings, presumable “unisex.” This reasoning is absurd, to say the least, for anyone who believes in the omniscience and immutability of God. Changing models and structures is normal for human beings who learn by mistakes, but it would be abnormal and inconsistent for a God who knows the end from the beginning.

Like Angels. Some will retort, Did not Jesus say that “in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven” (Matt 22:30)? Does not this passage indicate that at the resurrection all sex distinctions will be abolished and our bodies will no longer be physical? This conclusion cannot be legitimately drawn from Jesus’ statement. Here Jesus refers to the angels, not in order to teach the nonphysical nature of the resurrection body or the absence of sex differences in the new world, but simply to explain that the institution of marriage will no longer exist, since there will be no need to bring new children into the world.

The reason why the six brothers of the hypothetical situation created by the Sadducees married in succession their brother’s widow was to “raise up children for [their] brother” (Matt 22:24). It seems legitimate to assume that in His reply Jesus refers to the angels to explain that in the new world marriage for the purpose of procreation will no longer exist. It is obvious that if no new children are brought into this world, there will be no possibility of marrying or of giving daughters in marriage.

The termination of the human reproductive capacity could be seen as a change in God’s original design of the physiological human structure. This is not necessarily true because the Scripture suggests that God had already contemplated such a change in His original plan, when He said, “Be fruitful and multiply, and *fill the earth*” (Gen 1:28).¹⁴ By this statement presumably God meant that the process of reproduction and multiplication of human beings

would have continued until the earth was filled with an adequate number of people for this earth to support.

Termination of Procreation. In a perfect world, without the presence of death, the optimum balance between people and land would have been reached much sooner than after the entrance of sin and death. It is feasible to assume that the resurrected and translated saints constitute the fulfillment of God's original plan for the "filling of the earth," since they will represent the optimum number of inhabitants this renewed earth can adequately support. In that case God will carry out His original plan to terminate the human reproductive cycle, so as to prevent the disruption of the ecological balance of this planet that would be caused by a population explosion.

This conclusion is supported also by the references to *names* "written before the foundation of the world in the book of life (Rev 13:8; cf. 17:8, 21:27; Dan 12:1; Phil 4:3). Such names suggest an original divine plan for an optimum number of righteous to inhabit this earth. It also suggests that once this optimum number has been reached, God in His providence would terminate the human reproductive cycle. The termination of the procreative function of marriage does not necessitate the termination of marriage as an intimate relationship between two persons of the opposite sex.

Permanence of Intimate Relationships. Nowhere does the Scripture suggest that the angels are "unisex" beings who are unable to enter into some type of intimate relationship comparable to the one to be found in human marriage. It is noteworthy that God has revealed Himself as a triune Being, consisting of three Persons who are so intimately united that we worship Them as one God. If God Himself lives in a most intimate eternal fellowship among the first, second, and third Persons of the Godhead, there is no reason to believe that God will ultimately abolish the intimate marital relationship He Himself established at creation.

Genesis 1:27 suggests that the image of God is found not in the male gender per se, but in the fact that "male and female he created them." If God's image was reflected at creation in the combined characteristics of the maleness and femaleness of the first human couple, we have reason to believe that such a combination will be preserved by God at His ultimate recreation. Creation is presented in the Scripture as a prototype of the final recreation. The goal of God's redemption is not the destruction of His first creation but its restoration to its original perfection. This is why the Scripture speaks of the resurrection of the body rather than of the creation of new beings.

The Meaning of the Resurrection of the Body

No Rehabilitation of Present Body. What does “the resurrection of the body” mean? Biblical writers knew as well as we do that it could no possibly mean the rehabilitation of our present physical bodies. First, because many bodies are sick or deformed, and second, because at death they decompose and return to dust: “When thou takest away their breath, they die and return to their dust” (Ps 104:29; cf. Eccl 3:20; Gen 3:19).

In spite of this Biblical witness many Christians have believed through the centuries in the resurrection of the very same particles composing the dead body. This belief is expressed in the earliest forms of the Apostles’ Creed which states: “I believe in . . . the resurrection of the flesh,” rather than “of the body.”¹⁵

Tertullian (c. 160-c. 225), who is regarded at the Father of Latin Christianity, argues at great length in his treatise *On the Resurrection of the Flesh* that God will resurrect the very “flesh which has been consigned to the ground.” He appeals to Jesus’ words, “the very hairs of our head are all numbered,” to prove that they will all be restored at the resurrection. “If they were to be lost,” Tertullian reasons, “where would be the use of having taken such a numeral care of them?”¹⁶

Body Means Person. This fundamental misunderstanding of the meaning of the resurrection could have been avoided by recognizing the simple truth that for Biblical writers the term “body” is simply a synonym for “person.” For example, when Paul writes, “we wait for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies” (Rom 8:23), he simply means the redemption of our total being. This meaning is evident later in the same epistle where Paul appeals “to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship” (Rom 12:1). Here the presenting of our “bodies” to God is explicitly defined as the rendering of our “spiritual worship” through our total being.

Preservation of Individuality. When Paul speaks of the resurrection of the body, he is clearly thinking of the whole person. As Michael Perry rightly points out, “In Paul’s usage, ‘body’ is not ‘something external’ to a man himself, something he *has*. It is what he *is*. Indeed, *soma* (the Greek word for ‘body’) is the nearest equivalent to our word ‘personality’.”¹⁷ In view of this fact, to believe in the resurrection/translation of the body means to believe that my human self, the human being that “I” am, will be restored to life again. It means that I will not be someone different from who I am now. I will be exclusively *myself*. In short, it means that God has committed Himself to preserving my individuality, personality, and character.

Future Personality Formed Now. The practical implications of the belief in the resurrection/translation of the body, as defined above, are not difficult to see. The fact that Christ at His Coming will resurrect all of us who have died, be restoring to each one of us our distinct personality and character as well as body, teaches us, as aptly states by Ellen G. White, that “the characters formed in this life will determine the future destiny.”¹⁸ This means, as the same author emphasizes, that “now is the time for all to cultivate the powers that God has given [us], that [we] may form characters for usefulness here and for a higher life hereafter.”¹⁹

Respect for our Bodies. To believe in the resurrection/translation of the body means also to treat our human body with respect because what we do to it and with it will determine the shape of the resurrection body. The model of the seed and the fruit used by Paul suggests that there is a degree of continuity between our present body and the resurrection body. This continuity condemns the exaggerated asceticism of those who despise their bodies as something earthly to be discarded once they reach the heavenly Canaan. It also condemns the libertinism of those who believe that they can indulge their bodies to the limit, since what happens to their bodies does not affect their souls.

Recognition of Our Love Ones. To believe in the resurrection/translation of the body means also to believe that we will be able to recognize our loved ones. We shall recognize our resurrected and translated loved ones, not necessarily because they will look exactly the same as when we last saw them. I was known to my grandmother as the little boy who visited her at her farmhouse. I am known to my wife as the bald man who she married 25 years ago with plenty of wavy hair. I will be known to my grandchildren, if the Lord has not returned, as that old man who is often reminiscing about his former days.

At the time of the resurrection/translation we will recognize our loved ones not because they will look as young or as old as when we last saw them, but because their unique individuality and personality is providentially preserved and resurrected by God. When we meet elementary or high school classmates after twenty or thirty years, most often we are greatly surprised by how much their external appearance has changed over the years. Yet as we talk together we soon realize that their unique personalities have not really changed. They are still the Mary, or the John, or the Bob we knew many years before.

The same principle applies to the recognition of our resurrected loved ones. We shall recognize them in spite of noticeable changes in their physical appearance, because God will resurrect their unique individuality and person-

ality. Summing up, we can say that the belief in the resurrection of the body challenges us to take seriously our total being with its mental, physical, and spiritual components, because we are “a temple of the Holy Spirit . . . which [we] have from God” (1 Cor 6:19) and which God will miraculously resurrect at Christ’s Return.

3. The Final Judgment

Concomitant with Second Advent. The resurrection of believers and unbelievers discussed above is closely related to the final judgment, since it is the former which makes the latter possible. We have seen in chapter 13 that the final judgment is clearly presented in the Scripture as being concomitant with the Second Advent. In a sense a major purpose of Christ’s Return is to execute the final judgment, which will dispose of evil in a decisively final and permanent way. Jesus Himself stated this truth when He said: “When the Son of man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate them one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats” (Matt 25:31-32). The outcome of this separation will be that the wicked “will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life” (Matt 25:46).

Paul reiterates the same basic truth when speaking of the final judgment: “For he will render to every man according to his works: to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; but for those who are factious and do not obey the truth, but obey wickedness, there will be wrath and fury” (Rom 2:6-8). Statements such as these indicate that a fundamental function of Christ’s Return is to execute a final and universal judgment that will determine the eternal destiny of every human being and usher in a new world.

Evaluative and Executive Phases. We have shown in chapter 14 that the executive phase of the final judgment is preceded and followed by an evaluative phase. The two phases are not explicitly differentiated in the Scripture because, as noted, to Bible writers the *fact* of the final judgment was more important than its *phases*. Yet we have found several Biblical passages which clearly suggest that the final judgment encompasses both an *evaluative* and an *executive* phase. The latter is carried out by Christ, first at His Return when He will reward living and resurrected believers with the gift of eternal life while destroying the living sinners (2 Thess 1:7-9); and second, at the end of the millennium when Christ will punish the resurrected unbelievers of all the ages with eternal death (“second death”—Rev 20:6, 14; 21:8).

The former, the evaluative phase, takes place before and after the Second Advent, and thus we have designated it as Pre-Advent and Post-Advent judgments. Both of these involve a judicial process that precedes Christ's executive act of granting rewards or punishments. Both are designed to enable moral intelligences to evaluate and accept the justice of God's judgment in saving some and condemning others. Both decide the eternal destiny of intelligent moral beings.

Two Outcomes. The difference between the Pre-Advent and Post-Advent evaluative phases of the final judgment is primarily in their outcomes. We have seen in chapter 14 that the Pre-Advent evaluative judgment is held in the presence of unfallen heavenly beings and reveals God's justice in Christ's Coming to reward the resurrected and living believers with the gift of eternal life. On the other hand, the Post-Advent evaluative judgment is conducted before saved human beings and reveals God's justice in Christ's coming down to this earth at the end of the millennium to punish the resurrected wicked with eternal death.

The ultimate outcome of the final judgment executed by Christ, first at His Second Advent and then at the end of the millennium, is eternal life for the righteous and permanent annihilation for the unrighteous. This Seventh-day Adventist understanding of the final judgment preserves the unity and finality which the Scripture attributes to this event. It enhances our appreciation of God's justice and strengthens our expectation of the Second Advent.

Basis for Confidence. The Biblical view of the final judgment as the decisive and final triumph of God's love and justice, executed by Christ at and after His Coming to vindicate and save believers and to condemn and destroy unbelievers, offers us reassurance, confidence, and inspiration. It reassures us that the present conflict between good and evil will not last forever, but will be terminated at Christ's Coming in a final and decisive way. It gives us confidence not to fear the day when "God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus" (Rom 2:16), because Christ is able not only to "keep [us] from falling" in this present life, but also "to present [us] without blemish before the presence of his glory" (Jude 24) on the Day of His judgment. It inspires and challenges us "to live sober, upright and godly lives" (Titus 2:12) because when Christ comes to execute the final judgment, He will invite into His kingdom "not every one who says to me 'Lord, Lord,' . . . but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven" (Matt 7:21).

PART THREE**THE OUTCOME OF CHRIST'S COMING****1. Restoration of this World**

The ultimate outcome of Christ's Return is the restoration of this world to its original perfection. The resurrection and the translation of believers, the final judgment, and the resurrection and destruction of the unbelievers, are all preparatory events leading to the final act of redemptive history: the creation of a "new heaven and a new earth" (Rev 21:1; 2 Pet 3:13).

The purpose of creation and of redemption will be ultimately accomplished when the effects of sin will be eradicated from the entire creation and a new, perfect order will be established by God. It is only when Paradise Lost will become Paradise Restored that the purpose of Christ's First and Second Comings into this world will be fully realized.

God promised mankind at creation that this earth would be our human habitation and inheritance (Gen 1:28). As a result of sin, our first parents were banished from the Garden of Eden and sent out into the earth now under a curse (Gen 3:17). The promise of final victory which God made immediately after the Fall (Gen 3:15) contains the implicit assurance of a restored paradise in a new earth.

The same assurance is implicitly present in God's promise to Abraham: "And I will give to you, and to your descendants after you, the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God" (Gen 17:8). Note that God promised the land of Canaan not only to Abraham's descendants but also to Abraham himself. Obviously this promise was never fulfilled to Abraham himself, because the only land he ever possessed in Canaan was a burial cave which he purchased from the Hittites (Gen 23).

Expansion of Old Testament Promises. The book of Hebrews informs us that Abraham looked forward to a greater fulfillment of God's promised inheritance of the land of Canaan, namely, "he looked forward to the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God" (Heb 11:10). The "city" to which Abraham looked forward is the New Jerusalem which will be on the new earth. Thus God's promise to Abraham will be ultimately fulfilled, not when the Jews repossess all the land of Palestine, as taught by dispensationalists, but when God will establish a new world as the inheritance of all the spiritual children of Abraham.

Paul states in Romans that God promised to Abraham and his descendants “that they should *inherit the world*” (Rom 4:13), not just the *land of Canaan*. The same expansion of the concept of the land can be seen in Christ’s beatitude: “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the *earth*” (Matt 5:5), which is a paraphrase of Psalm 37:11: “But the meek shall possess the *land*.” The promise of entrance into the rest and peace of the land of Canaan was not an end in itself, but a type of the rest and peace of the new earth which awaits the people of God (Heb 4:9). Thus the new earth represents the ultimate fulfillment of God’s promises to His people.

Annihilation or Renewal of Present Earth? What does the expression “a *new* heaven and a *new* earth” mean? Does it mean that the present universe will be completely annihilated, so that God will create a brand new world totally different from the present cosmos? Or does it mean that God will purify and renew the present world?

A good number of theologians favor the concept of the complete annihilation of the present earth and the creation of a brand new one. Appeal is made to passages such as 2 Peter 3:12 which says: “The heavens will be kindled and dissolved, and the elements will melt with fire!”

There is no doubt that the earth will be radically transformed by cataclysmic events when Christ executes His final judgment upon sinners and the effect of sin. Yet the Scripture does not support the concept of total extinction, annihilation, but rather of renewal and restoration of this earth. Four main reasons can be given.

2. Reasons for the Renewal of the Earth

New in Quality not in Origin. First, the term used in 2 Peter 3:13 and in Revelation 21:1 to designate the newness of this worlds (“*new* heaven and *new* earth”) in Greek is *kainos* and not *neos*. The difference between the two terms is significant. *Neos*, as J. Behm explains, is what “is new in time or origin,” while “*kainos* is what is new in nature, different from the usual, impressive, better than the old, superior in value or attraction.”²⁰ Thus the expression “a new heaven and a new earth” means the creation of a new cosmos which is not totally different from the present one, but rather better than the present one, because it will be gloriously renewed.

A good example of the meaning of *kainos* is found in 2 Corinthians 5:17 where Paul writes: “If any one is in Christ, he is a new [*kaine*] creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new [*kaina*] has come.” As the individual believer becomes “a new creature or creation” (both readings are possible) by being renewed and transformed by divine grace, so this whole world will

become “a new heaven and a new earth” by being purified and restored by divine power. In both instances the “new” stands in continuity with the old.

A second reason favoring the renewal rather than the annihilation of this world is Paul’s statement that “the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God” (Rom 8:21). The fact that Paul describes the ultimate restoration of this world as liberation “from its bondage to decay,” suggests a renewal of the present creation and not some totally different creation, bearing no relation to this world.

The Resurrection of the Body. A third reason is the continuity suggested by the resurrection bodies of believers. The fact that the Scripture speaks of the resurrection of the body, and not of the creation of new human souls or spirits, suggests a clear continuity between our present mode of existence and that of the new earth. If this is true for the human creation, we have reason to believe that it is equally true for the subhuman creation.

Satan’s Defeat. A fourth reason for preferring renewal over annihilation is that annihilation would represent a victory for Satan and not for God. This would mean, as Anthony A. Hoekema rightly explains, that “Satan would have succeeded in so devastatingly corrupting the present cosmos and the present earth that God could do nothing with it but to blot it totally out of existence. But Satan did not win such a victory. On the contrary, Satan has been decisively defeated. God will reveal the full dimensions of that defeat when he shall renew this very earth on which Satan deceived mankind and finally banish from it all the results of Satan’s evil machinations.”²¹

The practical implication of the renewal of the present earth is that we cannot write it off as a total loss and rejoice in its deterioration. On the contrary, we must work for the betterment of the world now in view of God’s plan to renew it at the end. Our mission is to develop and promote a distinctively Christian lifestyle which has value not only for this present world, but also for the world to come.

3. Biblical View of the New Earth

Misconceptions of the New World. “A fear of making the future inheritance seem too material,” writes Ellen White, “has led many to spiritualize away the very truths which lead us to look upon it as our home.”²² Such a fear has led many sincere believers to view the world to come as a spiritual retreat somewhere up in space where the souls of the redeemed will sing and pray everlastingly. This misconception is reflected even in the lines of popular hymns such as the one that says: “In mansions of glory and endless delight, I’ll ever adore Thee in heaven so bright.”

The thought of spending eternity in a spiritual world somewhere off in space, wearing white robes, plucking harps, singing, meditating, and contemplating, can hardly appeal to twentieth-century Christians in love with the sights and sounds of the great metropolis. We noticed in chapter 12 that this misconception of the new world is one of the major factors which has contributed to dampen the expectation of Christ's Return, since many see this event as the end of their real life upon this earth.

Biblical Realism. The vision of an ethereal, spiritual paradise somewhere up in space has been inspired by Greek philosophy rather than by Biblical teachings. Both the Old and the New Testaments speak of a "new heaven and a new earth" (Is 65:17; Rev 21:1) as being not a different world somewhere off in space, but as being the present heaven and earth renewed and transformed to their original perfection.

We have shown in another study how the vision of the peace, harmony, material prosperity, and delight of the primordial Sabbath—Adam's *First Day* after his creation—functions in the Old Testament times as paradigm of the *Last Days*, a common designation for the world to come.²³ The peace and harmony that existed between Adam and the animals will be restored in the new earth when "the wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid, and the calf and the lion and the fating together, and a little child shall lead them" (Is 11:6).

Similarly the prosperity and abundance which prevailed at creation will be restored in the new earth where "the plowman shall overtake the reaper and the treader of grapes him who sows the seed; the mountains shall drip sweet wine, and all the hills shall flow with it" (Amos 9:13; cf. Is 4:2; 30:23-25; Joel 3:18; Zeph 3:13). These descriptions convey the picture of a real and abundant "earthly" life in the new world.

Urban Life. The New Testament is equally emphatic on the continuity between life in the present world and that in the world to come. Perhaps the most powerful image used to convey the sense of continuity and realism of the new world is the image of the city. Hebrews, for example, says that Abraham "looked forward to the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God" (Heb 11:10). The experience of Abraham is a type of the experience of all the believers, because, as the same author explains, "here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city which is to come" (Heb 13:14).

The New Testament closes with a most impressive description of the Holy City, Jerusalem, into which are welcome "only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life" (Rev 21:27). It is doubtful that all the details of the city are to be taken literally. For example why should the Holy City have a

very high wall which would prevent its citizens from viewing the marvelous panorama beyond the city walls? Obviously the vision of such a high wall conveyed to John and to his contemporaries the assurance of complete security. In those days the taller the wall the more peacefully the inhabitants could sleep at night.

Similarly the references to the names of the twelve tribes inscribed on the twelve gates (Rev 21:12) and to the names of the twelve apostles written on the twelve foundations (v. 14) suggest that the citizens of the Holy City consist of believers from both the Old and New Testament communities. Whatever the meaning of all the details, the vision of the Holy City conveys the image, not of mystical, monastic life in a heavenly retreat, but of urban life of intense activity on this renewed earth.

Active, Exciting Life. The Biblical vision of the Holy City suggests that life in the new earth will not be one of isolation and loneliness, but of communion, excitement, and action. The new earth will be a complex, cosmopolitan place where all kinds of people of different races, cultures, and languages will live and work together in peace. Life will not be static and boring, but dynamic and creative.

“In the New Jerusalem,” Shirley C. Guthrie writes, “there will be community without uniformity, individuality without irresponsibility. The problem of individual rights vs. community welfare will be solved in such a way that community serves individual, and individual serves the community, in a commonwealth of free responsible beings united in love.”²⁴

The image of redeemed living together in the City of God in interrelatedness and interdependence represents the fulfillment of the divine intent for creation and redemption. At creation God willed that human beings would find their fulfillment not by living alone, but in working together to subdue and have dominion over the earth. Through redemption Christ reconciles us to God and to fellow beings so that we can live in peace even with those whom we once viewed as enemies.

Urban Life Sanctioned by God. The fact that we Christians look forward to a new heaven and a new earth in which there will be the City of God should teach us to view the structure of urban life as sanctioned by God. For many it is difficult to accept this view because our present cities are hardly a reflection of the City of God. On the contrary, they are the places where hate, hostility, and indifference toward God and fellow beings prevail.

The present state of urban life should not cause us to reject in principle urbanization as a sinful social structure. The fact that urban life will continue

in the new earth tells us that it will be possible for people to live together in a complex urban system of interrelatedness and interdependence, without giving rise to the social, economic, ecological, political, and racial problems we are experiencing today. Moreover, this vision of living together in the future city of God should challenge us as Christians not to abandon the cities en masse by fleeing to the country, but to work in and for the cities by offering our Christian influence and help in solving the many complex problems.

4. A Preview of Life in the New Earth

Glimpses of Reality. The chief Biblical passages which speak of life in the new earth (Is 65:17-25; 66:22-23; Rev 21:1 to 22:5) offer us only a few glimpses of what life will really be like there. Thus any attempt to characterize the life, the conditions, and the pursuits of the world to come must be seen as very limited and imperfect efforts to describe a reality which “no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived” (2 Cor 2:9).

It is the lack of detailed information about the new earth that has made it more difficult for writers to portray paradise than hell. Milton’s *Paradise Regained* is but a pale reflection of the power and realism of *Paradise Lost*. The same is true of Dante’s *Paradiso* which lacks the realism and vividness of his *Inferno* (Hell). In view of the limited divine revelation about life in the new earth, we can only allude to some of its significant aspects suggested by the Scripture.

The Presence of God. A most unique and rewarding aspect of life in the new earth will be an unprecedented experience of the present of God among His people. “Behold, the dwelling of God is with men. He will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself will be with them” (Rev 21:3). These familiar words are the central promise of God’s covenant of grace (cf. Gen 17:7; Jer 31:33; Heb 8:10) which will be fully realized in the new earth.

In His parables Jesus often spoke of human destiny in terms of being in God’s presence. He compared the destiny of His followers to a wedding feast where He Himself will be the bridegroom (Matt 25:1-13) or the host (Matt 22:1-10); also to a household to which the Master, Christ Himself, returns to reward His faithful servants, saying, “enter into the joy of your master” (Matt 25:21; cf. Luke 12:35-38).

God’s presence in the new earth is so real that “the city has no need of sun or moon to shine upon it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb” (Rev 21:23). This passage indicates that in the new earth, the heaven, the place where God dwells, and the earth, the human habitation, will no longer be separated but will be merged.

Believers will enjoy in the new earth the blessed fellowship that Adam and Even experienced each Sabbath when God came to visit them. The Fall interrupted this blessed fellowship but the Sabbath remained to remind believers of its future restoration (Heb 4:9). Our weekly celebration of the Sabbath nourishes our hope of the future fellowship with God in the new earth. That will be, as Augustine puts it, “the greatest of Sabbaths” when “we shall rest and we shall see; we shall see and we shall love; we shall love and we shall praise; this is what will be at the end without end.”²⁵

Fellowship with All Believers. The fellowship we will enjoy with the Trinity will bring us into communion with believers of all the ages and from all over the world. Today we can only fellowship with those who live in our time and in our immediate surroundings. In the new earth our fellowship will extend to those who lived in every age and country: patriarchs, prophets, apostles, martyrs, missionaries, pioneers, our family ancestors and descendants, pastors, and laity.

The symbol of this grand fellowship is the great wedding banquet of the Lamb: “Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb” (Rev 19:9). This fellowship will include “a great multitude which no man could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and tongues” (Rev 7:9). It is impossible to imagine the inspiration and information we will gain from becoming personally acquainted with the greatest minds and souls who ever lived.

Absence of Evil. A most notable difference between our present life and that of the new earth will be the absence of all the things which now limit or harm our lives. The Devil, who is the ultimate source of all forms of evil, will be destroyed in the lake of fire (Rev 20:10). Consequently, there will be no more manifestation of evil within us or around us. It is hard to imagine what it will be like to live in the new world where there will be no more hate, jealousy, fear, hostility, discrimination, deception, oppression, killing, cut-throat competition, political rivalries, arms races, economic recessions, racial tensions, starvation, disparity between the rich and the poor, or sickness and death.

“He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away” (Rev 21:4). These bold strokes suggest far more than they actually indicate. They suggest that there will be no more incurable diseases, no more tragic accidents, no more crippled children, no more funeral services, no more permanent separations. They also suggest that we will be able to accomplish our God-inspired goals. In our present life

sickness or death often terminates the ambitious projects we are pursuing. In the new earth everyone will have unlimited time and resources to achieve the highest goals.

Absence of Fear. The absence of evil will be evident especially in the absence of fear, insecurity, and anxiety. Our present life is constantly exposed to dangers, uncertainties, and fears. We fear the loss of our job, the break-in by a robber in our home, the breaking down of our car, the unfaithfulness of our marital partner, the failure of our children at school or at work, the deterioration of our health, the rejection by our peers. In a word, we fear all the uncertainties of life. Such fears fill our lives with anxiety, thus contradicting God's purpose for our lives and diminishing our human potential.

The Scripture uses various images to reassure us that in the new earth there will be no fear or insecurity. It speaks of a city with permanent foundations built by God Himself (Heb 11:10), and of "a kingdom that cannot be shaken" (Heb 12:28). Perhaps the most suggestive picture of security for a first-century Christian was that of a city with "a great high wall" (Rev 21:12). Once its massive gates were closed, its citizens could live inside in relative security. To emphasize the complete security in the new earth, the Holy City was shown to John as having walls which are as high as their length (Rev 21:16).

Another significant image designed to convey the sense of perfect security in the new earth is that of the disappearance of the sea ("the sea was no more"—Rev 21:1). The sea was seen as a threat to the security of the universe (cf. Rev 13:1; 17:15) especially by the Hebrews, who, not having a maritime force, were constantly exposed to the danger of sudden attacks from the sea. Thus the absence of the sea from the new earth means that absence of threats to its security and harmony. The same sense of security would be best conveyed to twentieth-century Christians by other types of images such as: no alarm system, no security locks, no homeowner insurance, no security check points, no strategic defense system. Irrespective of the imagery used, the assurance is that in the new earth we will be set free from the crippling effects of fear and anxiety.

Absence of Pollution. One of the most pleasant aspects of life in the new earth will be its clean environment. "Nothing unclean shall enter it, nor any one who practices abomination or falsehood" (Rev 21:27). Freedom from the moral pollution of sin will be reflected in the freedom from the physical pollution of the environment. Life will no longer be threatened by the irresponsible pollution and depletion of the natural resources, because the

citizens of the new earth will be faithful stewards of God's new creation. There will not be "smoking sections" in the new earth, because no one will ever wish to smoke his or her health away. What a relief it will be to be able to breathe always fresh, clean air outdoors and indoors; to be able to drink from any fountain clear, sparkling water; to be able to eat wholesome fresh food uncontaminated by pesticides or preservatives!

We are not told how God will purify this earth from its air, water, and soil pollution. Peter alludes to a purification by fire when he writes: "The heavens will be kindled and dissolved, and the elements will melt with fire!" (2 Pet 3:12). Fire was known in the ancient world as the main purifying agent. It is feasible, however, that God will use other means besides fire to reach into the depths of the earth to clean up the toxic wastes dumped underground. Whatever method God may use to radically eliminate the pollution present in the air, water, and soil, the assurance is that the new earth will be both morally and physically clean.

Reassuring is also the fact that the citizens of the new earth will be responsible stewards of God's new creation who will not spoil it again. They will presumably produce little waste and know how to dispose of it in a way that nature will be able to assimilate it and process it. A perfect ecological equilibrium will be preserved which will guarantee the well-being of the human and subhuman creation.

Activity and Creativity. Life in the new earth will not be spent in idleness or passive mediation, but in productive activity and creativity. Those who think that the redeemed will live in the new world as glorified guests, fed, housed, and entertained by God, are totally misled. The new earth is not a kind of Disneyland magic world where God provides endless free rides to everyone. There will be no "free loaders" in the world to come. Isaiah writes: "They shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit. They shall not build and another inhabit; they shall not plant and another eat" (Is 65:21-22).

The Biblical picture of tomorrow's world is one where real people engage in productive activity and creativity. There will be no lack of time or of resources to complete our projects. In the field of knowledge today we can only scratch the surface of any discipline we choose to specialize in. The more we learn, the more we realize there is yet much to be learned. In the new earth there will be no limit to our growth in knowledge and grace. "Every faculty will be developed, every capacity increased. The acquirement of knowledge will not weary the mind or exhaust the energies. There the grandest enterprises may be carried forward, the loftiest aspirations reached, the

highest ambitions realized; and still there will arise new heights to surmount, new wonders to admire, new truths to comprehend, fresh objects to call forth the powers of mind and soul and body.”²⁶

Continuity with Present Culture. Life in the new earth will involve some continuity with what we may loosely term our present culture. This is suggested by the fact noted earlier that the Bible speaks of the transformation of this world rather than of its annihilation. Continuity is also indicated by the resurrection of the body, which implies a preservation and continuation of our personalities from death into resurrection.

‘Another significant indication of continuity is found in Revelation 21:24, 26 which says: “The kings of the earth shall bring their glory into it [the city], . . . they shall bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations.” This passage suggests first of all that the inhabitants of the new earth will include persons who have attained great prominence and power in this world: kings, presidents, scientists, and the like. Second, the unique contribution which each nation has made to the betterment of the present life will enrich the life of the new earth. This gives us reason to believe that the technological breakthroughs of our time in the fields of computers, communication, and travel will not be lost but greatly enhanced, refined, and perfected.

Stephen Travis perceptively notes that “God who affirms the goodness of the world he has made, will not simply write it off with all its wealth of art and beauty and human inventiveness. In God’s economy nothing is wasted. All the creative work of men and women which reflects the abundant creativity of God will be carried over into the transformed world.”²⁷ God values our creative accomplishments, often produced at great personal sacrifice. It is comforting to think that their value will extend beyond this present life to the new earth. The preservation in the new earth of the unique accomplishments of mankind suggests also that life there will not be dull and colorless but exciting and fulfilling.

Regular Worship. Central to the life in the new earth will be the regular worship of God. Isaiah describes the regularity and stability of worship in the new earth in terms familiar to his time: “From new moon to new moon, and from sabbath to sabbath, all flesh shall come to worship before me, says the Lord” (Is 66:23). The context indicates that this regular gathering for worship refers first of all to the hoped-for political restoration of Jerusalem and of its religious services (v. 20), and second, to the End-time restoration of this earth, of which the former was a type. The prophets often see the ultimate divine accomplishments through the transparency of imminent historical events.

Isaiah mentions the “new moon” together with the Sabbath, because the former played a vital role in determining the beginning of the new year, of each month, and also the date for celebrating key annual festivals such as Passover, Pentecost, and the Day of Atonement. Since the date of the new moon was determined by actual observation, its appearance was crucial to the stability of the civil and religious calendar. This is why Isaiah (66:23) and Ezekiel (46:3) speak of regular assembling on the new moon and on the Sabbath in the restored Jerusalem. To them this signified worship regularity and stability.

There is no reason to believe that the redeemed will assemble for worship on the day of the new moon, because its primary function was to aid the Israelites in calculating their annual feasts and in preparing for them. Since the function of the liturgical calendar of the Temple terminated with the First Coming of Christ, there is no reason why the annual feasts should be restored in the new earth. John saw “no temple in the city” (Rev 21:22), because its symbolic services and festivals found their fulfillment in the atoning sacrifice of Christ (Heb 8:5; 9:9, 11-12).

Isaiah mentions the new moon as a time of regular worship gathering in the new earth because he describes the latter in the context of the historical regathering of the Jews “from all the nations” (Is 66:20). It is therefore necessary to distinguish between those elements which applied to national Israel, such as the new moon, and those elements which will continue in the new earth, such as the Sabbath. Moreover, it is important to note that Isaiah’s concern is to emphasize the stability and regularity of both the social and religious life (“the new earth . . . your descendants and your name” “shall remain”—Is 66:22). This assurance applies both to the past promised restoration of Jerusalem and to the future life in the new earth.

Richer Worship. In the new earth both personal and public worship will be not only regular but also richer in expression and meaning. The hymns in the book of Revelation give us a glimpse of what such worship might be like. It is said that the 144,000 will sing “a new song” which no one could learn except those “who had been redeemed from the earth” (Rev 14:3). Presumably this song is new and unique because it is a song of experience which expresses personal gratitude to God for His marvelous redemption. Those who have conquered the final deception are seen by John as standing on or beside what appeared to be like a “sea of glass mingled with fire” and singing “the song of the Lamb” which says: “Great and wonderful are thy deeds, O Lord God the Almighty! Just and true are they ways, O King of the Ages! . . . All nations shall come and worship thee, for they judgments have been revealed” (Rev 15:2-4).

The hymns of the book of Revelation suggest that the keynote of worship in the new earth will be the praise of the worthiness of God for His perfect creation (4:11), marvelous redemption (5:9, 12) and final vindication and restoration of His people (15:3-4; 19:1-3). Since the essence of worship is the acknowledgment of the worthiness of God through praise and adoration, worship in the new earth will be richer because the redeemed will have a fuller appreciation of the worthiness of God.

In this present life we worship God though we do not always understand why He allows the wicked to prosper and the innocent to suffer. In the new earth this mystery will be solved, as the redeemed are given the opportunity to understand the fairness of God's judgments. "All nations shall come and worship thee, for they judgments have been revealed" (Rev 15:4). This revelation of divine justice and mercy will inspire the redeemed to praise God, saying: "Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, for his judgments are true and just" (Rev 19:1-2).

Worship will be richer in the new earth not only because of the fuller appreciation of God's mercy and justice, but also because of the opportunity to worship God visibly. "The throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in [the city], and his servants shall worship him; they shall see his face, and his name shall be on their foreheads" (Rev 22:3-4). This text suggests that the worship of God in the new earth will enrich believers with a fuller knowledge and enjoyment of God. In a sense this is the ultimate function of the worship of God, namely, to experience His present, peace, and power in our lives. This experience will be so real in the new earth that the place will truly be heaven.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter we have examined the Biblical teaching regarding the *manner*, the *purpose*, and the ultimate *outcome* of Christ's Return to this earth. We have seen that the *manner* of Christ's Return will be personal, visible, sudden, glorious, and triumphant.

The basic *purpose* of Christ's Return is to complete His redemptive work by executing the final judgment which will result in the gathering of believers into His Kingdom and the eternal destruction of unbelievers. We have shown that believers will be resurrected by God as real physical persons with their unique individuality, personality, and character developed in this life.

The ultimate *outcome* of Christ's Return will be the restoration of this world to its original perfection. We have seen that the new world will not be a totally different world somewhere off in space inhabited by spiritual souls,

but our present earth, restored to its original perfection and inhabited by real physical persons. We have found that the Scriptures portray the new earth as a complex, cosmopolitan place where people of different races, cultures, and languages will live active and exciting lives.

Some of the most rewarding aspects of living in the new earth will be to worship God visibly, to experience more fully His presence and power in our lives, to fellowship with believers of all the ages, to achieve our loftiest aspirations, to live in a clean and happy world, without the fear of pollution, violence, accident, sickness, and death. This will be the consummation of the Advent Hope: the time when, as eloquently expressed by Ellen White, “Sin and sinners are no more. The entire universe is clean. One pulse of harmony and gladness beats through the vast creation. From Him who created all, flow life and light and gladness, throughout the realms of illimitable space. From the minutest atom to the greatest world, all things, animate and inanimate, in their unshadowed beauty and perfect joy, declare the God is love.”²⁸

NOTES TO CHAPTER 15

1. Emphasis supplied.

2. Emphasis supplied.

3. Emphasis supplied.

4. Emphasis supplied.

5. Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View, California, 1948), vol. 2, pp. 191-192.

6. Ellen White says that even at the ascension “a cloud of glory hid Him from their [disciples] sight” (*The Desire of Ages* [Mountain View, California, 1940], p. 831).

7. Oscar Cullmann, *Salvation in History*, trans. S. G. Sowers (New York, 1967), p. 84.

8. See, for example, J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come* (Grand Rapids, 1980), pp. 402-411.

9. Seventh-day Adventists believe that at the Second Advent there will be also a “special resurrection” of certain wicked persons who have fiercely opposed the work of God. This belief rests primarily on Revelation 1:7 which says that even those “who pierced him” will witness His glorious Coming (cf. Dan 12:2).

10. The only exception is the “special wicked” mentioned in n. 9 who will be resurrected at Christ’s Coming, but only to die again. At the end of the millennium they will be resurrected again to face their punishment of eternal death.

11. George Eldon Ladd, *The Last Things* (Grand Rapids, 1979), p. 79.

12. Emphasis supplied.

13. Anthony A. Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future* (Grand Rapids, 1979), p. 250.

14. Emphasis supplied.

15. A comparative table listing the various versions of the Apostles’ Creed is found in Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church* (Grand Rapids, 1959), vol. 2, p. 538.

16. Tertullian, *On the Resurrection of the Flesh*, chapter 35, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Grand Rapids, 1973), vol. 3, p. 571.

17. Michael Perry, *The Resurrection of Man* (Oxford, 1975), p. 119.

18. Ellen G. White, *Child Guidance* (Nashville, 1954), p. 229.

19. *Ibid.*, pp. 164-165.

20. J. Behm, “Kainos,” *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel (Grand Rapids, 1974), vol. 3, p. 447.

21. Anthony A. Hoekema (n. 13), p. 281.

22. Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy Between Christ and Satan* (Mountain View, California, 1950), p. 675.

23. Samuele Bacchiocchi, *The Sabbath in the New Testament* (Berrien Springs, Michigan, 1985), pp. 55-65.

24. Shirley C. Guthrie, *Christian Doctrine* (Atlanta, 1968), p. 398.

25. Augustine, *City of God* 22; 30.

26. Ellen G. White (n. 22), p. 677.

27. Steve Travis, *I Believe in the Second Coming of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, 1982), p. 181.

28. Ellen G. White (n. 22), p. 678.

Chapter 16

LIVING

THE ADVENT HOPE

What does it mean to be an “Adventist” Christian, that is to say, a person who lives in the expectancy of a soon-Coming Savior? How should the Advent Hope affect our life, work, values, and decisions? The answer to these vital questions determine to a large extent the relevance of the whole preceding study of the Advent Hope. After all, the importance of any belief is largely revealed by its impact upon the lifestyle of the individual believer and of the community of faith at large.

Objective of Chapter. This final chapter examines the practical implications of the doctrine of the Second Advent. The study is divided into two parts. In the first part we shall consider how to live the Advent Hope. We shall reflect upon what it really means to be an “Adventist.” The term “Adventist” will be used henceforth in this chapter to designate not exclusively a Seventh-day Adventist, but inclusively any and every Christian who lives in the expectancy of Christ’s imminent Return.

In the second part we shall consider how to nourish the Advent Hope. The passing of almost twenty centuries since Christ promised “I will come again and will take you to myself” (John 14:3) makes it easier today than ever before to become complacent or even skeptical about Christ’s Return. In fact, many have lost sight of its certainty, imminence, and relevance. Consequently, it is important to reflect upon how to keep alive the Advent Hope in our hearts and minds.

PART I

LIVING THE ADVENT HOPE

1. Two Dangers to Avoid

Overexcitement. Christians who wait for Christ’s soon Return are exposed to two dangers: overexcitement and indifference. There have been Christians in every age who became so excited at the thought of Christ’s imminent Coming that they gave up all efforts to work for their personal

future or for that of the society in which they lived. The problem existed already in apostolic times. Paul had to admonish the Thessalonian Christians, who had become so “quickly shaken in mind [and] excited” to the point of having stopped working, to become sober and go back to work “to earn their own living” (2 Thess 2:2; 3:12).

The same attitude exists among some Christians even today. These view the present world as a sinking ship and so they see no value in setting the course, polishing the brass or mending the sails. Rather than working of the ship, they spend their time on lifeboats, warning from a distance the passengers on the ship of its impending doom. They regard any attempt to improve social conditions as futile and unnecessary, since Christ at His Coming will destroy the present sinful world-order.

While it is true that the “heavens and earth that now exist have been stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment” (2 Pet 3:7), we must never forget that as Christ came to save this world by becoming concretely involved in it, so He has commissioned His followers to work faithfully in this world while awaiting the establishment of the new world at His Coming (John 9:4).

In the parable of the talents the nobleman, who represents Christ, commissions his servants saying: “Trade with these till I come” (Luke 19:13). The servants whom the Lord commends at His Coming are those who have waited for Him by doing business with the talents entrusted to them. A Christian works, not in spite of the expectation of Christ’s imminent Return, but because of it.

Indifference. While some Christians have become so excited in their expectancy of Christ’s Coming that they have abandoned the present world to its doom, others, by far the vast majority, have become so neglectful, even indifferent toward Christ’s Coming, that they have chosen to make the present world in practice the ultimate reality for which to live and to work. For these the present world is not a *waiting room* to the world to come, but a *living room* in which to live as comfortably and as relaxed as possible.

In chapter 12 we have considered several factors which have fostered indifference and neglect of the Advent Hope. Humanistic thinking has influenced some Christians to interpret the Second Advent as a present, existential experience of the future. Materialistic ideologies have tempted Christians to seek for the establishment of Christ’s Kingdom through political, economic programs, and technological advancements. Conflicting

theological views regarding the rapture, the tribulation, the millennium, and the Advent signs have all in their own way contributed to devitalize the Advent Hope. To the extent that Christians neglect or ignore the Blessed Hope, to that extent Christian life is deprived of present motivation and of future assurance.

To be an “Adventist,” that is, a Christian who lives in the expectancy of Christ’s Coming, means to avoid both the *overexcitement* which writes off the present world as doomed, and the *indifference* which makes the present world the ultimate reality for which to live and work. It means “to live sober, upright and godly lives” (Titus 2:12), maintaining the delicate balance between being concretely involved in the salvation of this world, and not becoming so entangled in its affairs as to lose sight of the world to come.

2. Living With a Forward Look

The Forward Look. To be an Adventist Christian means to live with a forward look. Some people look back longingly to some past Golden Age. Others look with satisfaction to 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 Pet 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, nor 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).

Pilgrim’s Attitude. To live with this forward look means to view our present life as a pilgrimage, a journey to a better land. The writer of Hebrews notes that Abraham and all past true believers were pilgrims, with no permanent home on this earth. “They admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth. People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. Instead, they were longing for a better country—a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them” (Heb 11:13-16, NIV).

Do we view ourselves as pilgrims or as permanent residents of this earth? Someone has said that twentieth-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 chickens in the pot.

This does not mean that Adventists must have a world-denying attitude and live like hermits. Christ had a vivid sense of the imminence of the End, yet He enjoyed food and fellowship to the extent that His enemies characterized Him as “a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!” (Matt 11:19). In His parables Christ shows unusual perception and appreciation for the world of nature, because He recognized that while His Kingdom was not of this world, yet this world is still God’s world.

To live with the forward look means then to enjoy the goodness of God’s creation still present in this world, while at the same time remembering that we are pilgrims passing through this world and journeying to the New Earth. This tension is found in Paul’s correspondence. In writing to Timothy, on the one hand Paul says: “Everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving” (1 Tim 4:4), while on the other hand he exhorts: “Take your share of suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No soldier on service gets entangled in civilian pursuits, since his aim is to satisfy the one who enlisted him” (2 Tim 2:3-4).

Christ-Centered Lives. To live with a forward look to the Second Advent means to focus our attention on Christ rather than on ourselves. So many tend to think mostly about their own needs, desires, and problems. But the more we focus our attention on ourselves, the less we tend to think of God and His Kingdom. The essence of a sinful life can be defined as independence from God, while the essence of a sinless life is dependency upon God. If our Christian life is to grow, then Christ must become more and more the center of our existence.

Living in the expectancy of Christ’s Return is one way to keep Him at the center of our lives. When we think of His Coming we are constantly reminded not only of what He has done in redeeming us from the penalty and power of sin, but also of what He will do for us at His Return by granting us the gift of eternal life and fellowship with Him. Faith anchored in Christ’s past, present, and future accomplishments enables us to be “more than conquerors through him who loved us” (Rom 8:37).

Transitory Institutions. A forward look to the Coming of Christ affects our view of political and religious institutions. During the Middle Ages the

Church succeeded in leading many people to believe that it was building the City of God on earth. Today, there are Christians who hope to establish God's Kingdom upon this earth by improving existing social and political structures and by promoting economic and technological advancements which can benefit mankind.

The forward look to the future Kingdom of God challenges us not to invest present religious or political institutions with permanent value and functions because they are not the method by which the Kingdom of God is to be established. It challenges us to recognize that when Jesus comes all our human institutions, including our Christian ones, will come to an end.

We must build for future generations while recognizing that the future does not belong by right to what we build. This means that our institutions must not become fossilized structures, but must be capable of change in order to respond to new situations. We might say that institutions must express the same pilgrim quality of adaptability of the Adventist believers. The ultimate effect of living with a forward look is to view all our institutions and personal decisions in the light of the Advent of our Lord.

3. Living by the Spirit

Anticipation of the Future. To be a fervent Adventist living in the expectancy of Christ's soon-Return is possible only through the enablings of the Holy Spirit. The passing of twenty centuries can make it easier today than ever before to doubt the certainty, the imminence, and the relevance of Christ's Return. A vital function of the Holy Spirit is to enable us to overcome such doubts by offering us in the present an anticipation of the blessings of the new world. This experienced is made possible by the Holy Spirit in several ways.

First, the Spirit assures us of our *divine sonship* and thus of our future inheritance to be received at Christ's Coming (Rom 8:14-17; Eph 1:14). Through the Spirit we receive the *first fruits* of God's harvest, that is, a foretaste of the blessings of the world to come (Rom 8:23). It is only a foretaste, but a real taste nonetheless. This truth is brought out in Hebrews where it says that through the Spirit we taste "the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come" (Heb 6:5). The Holy Spirit offers us the *guarantee* of the ultimate consummation of our salvation at Christ's Coming (2 Cor 1:22; 5:5; Eph 1:14).

Christ emphasized the importance of having our hearts constantly filled with the Holy Spirit, through the parable of the Ten Virgins (Matt 25:1-13). The foolish virgins were unprepared to meet Christ, the Bridegroom, at His Coming, because they failed to fill their lives with the power of the Holy

Spirit. It is impossible to develop a character fit for eternity by deferring to ask for the power of the Spirit until the last minute, when it is forever too late.

The uncertainty felt by many today regarding the reality and imminence of the Second Advent may well reflect the absence of the influence of the Holy Spirit in their lives. “Hope does not disappoint us,” writes Paul, when “God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit” (Rom 5:5). Divine realities are grasped, not through mere intellectual reasoning but through the reception and illumination of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 2:12-14).

Harmonious Community. A visible indication of the outworking of the Holy Spirit is the breaking down of social, racial, cultural, and religious barriers. A marvelous thing happened at Pentecost when people of different nations were drawn together, as the Holy Spirit laid hold of their lives. A new sense of community began to develop as Jew and Gentile believers gradually acknowledged: “By one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit” (1 Cor 12:13).

To be an Adventist means to allow the Holy Spirit to perform the same miracle today of breaking down those divisive social, racial, cultural, and religious barriers which we are so prone to erect. If we truly look forward to living in harmony in the cosmic community of the new earth, then we must be prepared to foster a sense of unity, harmony, and peace among all people. “Our witness to the reality of heaven will not be taken seriously in the world,” notes Stephen Travis, “unless we show some signs of belonging to a community which transcends the barriers of race and class—a community committed to costly caring for each other. When the Church strives after that ideal, it is a symbol of hope.”¹

Living Christ-like. The influence of the Holy Spirit can only be seen in the life of the Church at large if it is first felt in the life of individual believers. Through the Spirit’s power we can give to the world a glimpse of the quality of life in the world to come by living more and more in the likeness of Christ now. Looking forward to be with Christ and to become like Him when He comes again, means to live more and more Christ-like in this present life.

This truth is clearly expressed by John: “Beloved, we are God’s children now; it does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. And every one who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure” (1 John 3:2-3). This Christ-likeness is not a human achievement, but a divine outworking in our lives through the influence of the Holy Spirit: “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).

Becoming increasingly Christ-like in character used to be called “holiness,” a concept which is no longer popular today. Some find this goal so out of reach that they choose to settle for lesser standards. To strive for a lesser goal means to doubt the power of the Holy Spirit to produce within us a character fit for the new earth. John Wesley remarks: “Repentance is the porch of religion, faith is the door of religion, holiness is religion itself . . . None shall live with God but he that now *lives to* God; none shall enjoy the glory of God in heaven but he that bears the image of God on earth.”² The awareness of living in the shadow of the Second Advent offers a constant incentive to live a life of piety and holiness. Peter emphasizes this fact by asking a searching question: “Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of persons ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness!” (2 Pet 3:11). If we plan to live in “new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells” (2 Pet 3:13), then we must seek by the power of the Holy Spirit to become fit to dwell in that new world.

4. Living a Balanced Life

The Christ-like life we are called to live by the power of the Holy Spirit, while awaiting the imminent Return of Christ, can be characterized as a balanced life. The Scripture speaks of several significant characteristics of the Adventist lifestyle. Peter mentions several specific qualities: “The end of all things is at hand; therefore keep sane and sober for your prayers. Above all hold unfailing your love for one another, since love covers a multitude of sins” (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.” The Greek verb Peter uses is *sophronein* which literally means “to keep the mind safe,” that is to say, to preserve one’s sanity. The chief characteristic of sanity is its capacity to see things in their proper perspective; to distinguish between right and wrong, the important and unimportant; to remain calm in the midst of adversities; to avoid unreasonable fanaticism and unrealizing indifference.

Adventists need in a special way to preserve their sanity, because, as noted earlier, they are exposed to the dual dangers of overexcitement and indifference. During my speaking engagements across North America and overseas, I have been repeatedly made painfully aware of the existence of individuals and groups who have lost their sanity by championing fanatical,

extreme teachings which are divisive and bring Christianity into disrepute. As we draw closer and closer to the ominous year 2000, more and more Christians will be in danger of losing their sanity by making sensational predictions regarding the time and manner of the End, and by promoting survival programs and products. Unhealthy and unbecoming commercialism may even play a role here.

Sanity is needed today to be able to live soberly in this at-times-insane world and to work for it without losing sight of the reality of the world to come. It is not easy to preserve one's sanity, especially for those called to live and work in great urban centers, constantly exposed to the prevailing perversion, violence, immorality, materialism, and secularism. At a time when the old immorality is promoted as the new morality, adventists need more than ever before to preserve their sanity, in order to be able, as Paul says, "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 Savior Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:12-13).

Abhor Violence. To preserve one's sanity means also to abhor the way of violence. Jesus rejected violence as a method to establish His Kingdom. He chose the cross rather than the sword. Some Christians today, especially in some developing countries, are losing their sanity when advocating and practicing revolutionary violence to fight against the oppressors of the poor and to establish social justice. They lost sight of the fact that the Gospel transforms human lives and society, not through the power of the ballot or bullets, but through the power of divine grace.

The early Christians gradually changed the fabric of the Roman society, not through political activism or revolutionary tactics, but through the influence of divine grace manifested in their Christian lives and witness. They did not lose their sanity by trying to fulfill their mission through what could be called a "moral majority" type of partisan political activism. On the contrary, the early Christians preserved their sanity by recognizing that God had called them to be "the salt of the earth" (Matt 5:13), that is, the *moral minority* called to influence the *immoral majority* through the witness of their life, words, attitudes, and actions.

Preserve Your Sobriety. The second characteristic of an Adventist lifestyle, mentioned by Peter, is sobriety: "Be sober," that is to say, preserve your sobriety. The Greek verb used by Peter is *nephein*, which originally meant *to be sober* in contradistinction to being drunk. The verb came to mean to act soberly, temperately, sensibly. The great importance attached to the virtue of sobriety and temperance for Christians living in the End-time is

evidence by the fact that Peter refers to it twice again in the same epistle (1 Pet 1:13; 5:8). Paul also urges the Thessalonian Christians to be sober while awaiting the soon-Coming Savior: “Let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and *be sober*. For those who sleep sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night. But, since we belong to the day, let us *be sober*” (1 Thess 5:6-8).³

Sobriety and temperance are vital characteristics of the lifestyle of Adventist Christians who are called to live in readiness for the Lord’s Return. They are vital because they affect the capacity of the mind to perceive and to distinguish between right and wrong and thus to live uprightly. Paul compares the intemperate to those who sleep, because intemperance in eating, drinking, and working habits numbs the mind, rendering a person incapable of making wise decisions and of living in constant readiness for the Lord’s Return.

Any Christian who looks forward to becoming a citizen of the New Earth, where every person will live soberly and temperately (Rev 21:8, 27), must of necessity learn to live soberly and temperately in this present life. This involves, for example, abstaining from intoxicating substances such as alcoholic beverages, tobacco, and drugs. One can legitimately ask whether any person who chooses to smoke or drink his or her health away, rather than quitting the habit by divine grace, is really interested in becoming a citizen of the New Earth where no person with unclean habits will be admitted (Rev 21:27).

The Extent of Sobriety. The sobriety and temperance that must characterize Adventist believers extends beyond the use of intoxicants to include the entire lifestyle. A person may abstain from the use of alcohol, tobacco, and drugs, and yet be intemperate by eating excessively, exercising minimally or not at all, dressing extravagantly, buying luxurious cars, or living in an expensive house simply to boost his social status.

To live soberly and temperately in view of Christ’s Return means to learn 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 we buy more food than we can consume so that we find ourselves constantly throwing away food which has spoiled, 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!”

These observations suffice to illustrate how easy it is for us as Christians, who are privileged to live in the affluent societies of industrialized nations, to become victims of intemperance. Thus the admonition to preserve our sobriety while awaiting our soon-Coming Savior is particularly relevant to our lives today.

Preserve Your Prayer Life. Third, Peter explains the reason why we must preserve our sanity and sobriety, namely, “for your prayers,” that is to say, in order to pray as we ought. We may call this third characteristic of an Adventist lifestyle, “Preserve your prayer life.” It is not difficult to see the connection between sanity, sobriety, and prayer life. A person who lives an unbalanced life, by advocating fanatical ideas and programs, or by living a self-indulgent, 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 Savior 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.

The Power and the Protection of Prayer. Ellen White eloquently emphasizes the power of prayer in our lives when she writes: “Prayer is the key in the hand of faith to unlock heaven’s storehouse, where are treasured the boundless resources of Omnipotence. Without unceasing prayer and diligent watching we are in danger of growing careless and of deviating from the right path.”⁴ In this statement Ellen White underscores not only the power of prayer but also the protection that a regular prayer life offers us. First, there is

protection from the “danger of growing careless,” of becoming indifferent to spiritual values and realities. This danger is particularly present today when the materialistic values of our society are constantly tempting Christians to live for the present rather than for the future. Second, there comes protection from the danger of “deviating from the right path” by adopting teachings and practices which are contrary to the revealed will of God.

A regular prayer life protects us from the twofold dangers of indifference and apostasy by helping us to resist the external pressures to compromise our principles and by making us more perceptive of God’s will for our lives. Paul recognized the power and protection that prayer can give to Christians who live in the expectation of the Lord’s Return. He concludes his lengthy discussion on the manner and outcome of Christ’s Coming, by admonishing the Thessalonian Christians to “rejoice always, pray constantly, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you” (1 Thess 5:16-18).

By exhorting the Thessalonians to “pray constantly,” Paul did not mean that they should withdraw from the world to a monastic life of prayer and meditation. This is indicated by his warning to the same congregation to “keep away from any brother who is living in idleness and not in accord with the tradition that you received from us” (2 Thess 3:6; cf. 1 Thess 5:14). As Adventist Christians we must live like Christ and Paul, to use Ellen White’s happy phrase, “between the mountain and the multitude.”⁵ We must work intensively, making full use of the time and talents God has given us because “the night is far gone, the day is at hand” (Rom 13:12), while at the same time we must pray regularly in order to receive a daily divine provision of power and protection “to live sober, upright, and godly lives” (Titus 2:12) among a secular-minded generation.

Preserve Your Love. The fourth characteristic of a balanced Adventist lifestyle, mentioned by Peter, is unfailing love: “Above all hold unfeignedly your love for one another, since love covers a multitude of sins” (1 Pet 4:8). Peter here describes Christian love by the Greek term *ektenes* which has the dual meaning of being *zealous* and *outreaching*. This means that Christian love is not only zealous and never-failing, but also outreaching to all, including the unlovely and the unlovable. Such a love, Peter says, “covers a multitude of sins.”

Genuine Christian love covers a multitude of sins in at least two senses. First, in the sense that *our* love can overlook the faults of our fellow beings. As parents we find it easier to overlook the failures of our children than those of others. If we really love our fellow beings, we can accept and overlook

more readily their failures and faults. Second, in the sense that *God's* love covers and forgives our sins only when we love and forgive others. "Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors" (Matt 6:12). This unfailing, outreaching, and forgiving love must be present in the lives of Christians who are "waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God" (2 Pet 3:12).

Practice Hospitality. Unfailing Christian love can best be preserved by sharing it. Peter mentions two practical ways in which Christians who believe that "the end of all things is at hand" (1 Pet 4:7) can share their love: "Practice hospitality ungrudgingly to one another. As each has received a gift, employ it for one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace" (1 Pet 4:9-10).

The first way to show unfailing Christian love, according to Peter, is by practicing hospitality. Why? Basically because when we invite other people to our homes we are showing our love, not in words but in actions. Without the private hospitality of Christian homes the early Christian outreach would have come to a standstill. Traveling missionaries, like Peter and Paul, depended on the hospitality of church members (Acts 10:6; 21:7), because the few existing inns were not only expensive but notoriously immoral.

Moreover, during the first two centuries when there were no church buildings, Christians depended on the gracious hospitality of those who were willing to make available the bigger rooms of their homes for their worship gatherings (Rom 16:5; 1 Cor 16:19; Philemon 2). Without hospitable homes indoor church services would have been practically impossible. This explains why the New Testament repeatedly urges Christian leaders and members to practice hospitality (Rom 12:13; 1 Tim 3:2; 5:10; Titus 1:8; Heb 13:2). It is noteworthy that Christ at His Coming will commend the faithful, saying: "I was a stranger and you welcomed me," and He will condemn the unfaithful, saying: "I was a stranger and you did not welcome me" (Matt 25:35, 43).

If Christian hospitality was a key factor for the success of the early Christian's evangelistic outreach to the Roman world, it is also a key factor today to the success of our End-time mission to preach the Gospel of the Kingdom to all the world (Matt 24:14). There are many hurting and needy people in the world today who can best be reached, not through the printed page or broadcasting, but by inviting them to our homes where they can experience what God's love for them is all about.

Share Your Talents. A second way to show unfailing Christian love is by sharing our talents: "As each has received a gift, employ it for one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace" (1 Pet 4:10). The hope of our soon-

Coming Savior should motivate us not to hide our God-given talents, but to develop them fully in order to bring a greater blessing to others. In the parable of the Talents the only servant who is condemned at the return of the master is the one who chose to hide his talent by not using it (Matt 25:24-30).

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

Develop Your Talents. To use our talents 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 improving our social institutions. 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 those who wait for His Return. Christ expects us to plan and work for the future without, however, 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. As Adventist Christians we must keep this tension in balance in our lives.

Preserve Your Courage. A fifth characteristic of a balanced Adventist lifestyle may be called "courage in the midst of adversities." Peter alludes to this characteristic when he writes: "Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal which comes upon you to prove you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice in so far as you share in Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed" (1 Pet 4:12-13). The "fiery ordeal" most probably refers to the expected Neronian persecution during which many Christians suffered inhuman and atrocious martyrdom.

Peter urges believers not to become discouraged, but to rejoice when facing the imminent fiery ordeal. First, because as followers of Christ we know that persecution is not a "strange" happening. On the contrary, it is inevitable in the life of anyone who brings the standards of Jesus Christ before

the world. Christ warned, “If they persecuted me, they will persecute you” (John 15:20). Second, through persecution we share not only in Christ’s suffering but also in His glory. Paul emphasizes this truth by saying: “We suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him” (Rom 8:17; cf. 2 Tim 3:11). The Cross is the way to the crown.

It was the reassurance that the Lord will award a “crown of righteousness . . . to all who have loved his appearing” (2 Tim 4:8) that enabled Paul to fight “the good fight,” to finish “the race,” and to preserve the integrity of his faith (2 Tim 4:7). It is the same assurance that enables us today to preserve our courage as we are called to live and labor amid the pain, sorrows, tensions, problems, uncertainties, and defeats of this present life. “I am coming soon; hold fast what you have, so that no one may seize your crown” (Rev 3:11). If we did not have this assurance that Christ is coming soon to bring to an end the pain and problems of this present life, we could easily be tempted to lose courage and become disillusioned with life itself.

We can endure almost anything if we have hope that something better awaits us at the end of our pilgrimage. This assurance is nourished in our hearts by the Advent Hope. As Adventists we know that “the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us” at Christ’s Coming (Rom 8:18). The vision of a glorious future that Christ will establish as His Coming can inspire us to face courageously the pain, persecutions, and perplexities of this present life. After describing how Christ will bestow the gift of immortality on the redeemed at His Coming, Paul exhorts the Corinthians, “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain” (1 Cor 15:58).

PART TWO

NOURISHING THE ADVENT HOPE

In view of the vital role the Advent Hope should play in our Christian lives, consideration will be given in the remaining part of this chapter to five specific ways to nourish the Advent Hope in our hearts.

1. Worship

A Foretaste of Heavenly Worship. An important way to nourish and strengthen the Advent Hope in our hearts is through personal and corporate worship. When we worship we break through the barriers of time and space and experience a foretaste of the blessedness of the future heavenly worship

in the present of God and in the fellowship of the redeemed of all ages. The writer to the Hebrews speaks of this vital function of worship: “You have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to a judge who is God of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant” (Heb 12:22-24).

This passage enumerates some of the future glories that we can apprehend and anticipate, especially through the worship experience, namely, the new Jerusalem, the joyful gathering of the angels, and the fellowship of the redeemed and of Christ Himself. It is difficult to describe how the communal worship with fellow believers enables us temporarily to forget and transcend the unpleasant realities of this present life and to catch a glimpse of the blessedness of the world to come.

The songs, the prayers, the proclamation, the witness of and fellowship with fellow members can give us a foretaste of the future heavenly Jerusalem and the festal gathering of God’s children. Such an experience nourishes and strengthens the Advent Hope in our hearts by giving us a vision and a foretaste of the glories of the Second Advent. “Where there is no vision, the people perish” (Prov 29:18, KJV). The vision of the glories of the Second Advent, captured especially through the worship experience, can help keep alive the flame of the Advent Hope.

Mutual Encouragement. Corporate worship also nourishes the Advent Hope by providing opportunities for encouraging one another. The pain, the sorrow, the frustrations, the disillusionments and the tensions of this life constantly tempt us to give up hope in a future divine solution to our present problems. The encouragement we receive from a caring church family, especially when we feel that the burdens of this life are too heavy to bear, can renew our hope and help us to see the light at the end of the tunnel.

The writer to the Hebrews speaks specifically of the mutual encouragement that Adventist Christians receive from worshipping together: “Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful; and let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, *not neglecting to meet together*, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and *all the more as you see the Day drawing near*” (Heb 10:23-25).⁶

It is noteworthy that the need to assemble together for worship and mutual encouragement is presented in this passage as all the more pressing as the Day of Christ’s Coming draws near. The reason is that the nearer we draw

to the Return of Christ, the more intense will be Satan's efforts to undermine the work of God in our lives and in this world. "Woe to you, O earth and sea, for the devil has come down to you in great wrath, because he knows that his time is short!" (Rev 12:12). The inspiration and encouragement we receive from worshiping together with fellow believers can help us to hold fast to our faith and hope in the soon-Coming Savior.

2. Lord's Supper

A vital aspect of worship that can nourish our Advent Hope is the celebration of the Lord's Supper. Whenever we eat the bread and drink the wine we "proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (1 Cor 11:26). In other words, by participating in the Lord's Supper we celebrate not only the *Passion* but also the *Parousia* of our Lord. On the one hand, we look back to the Last Supper and the atoning sacrifice of our Lord, and on the other hand, we look forward to the Marriage Supper and the Glorious Return of our Lord.

Symbols are essential to conceptualize and experience spiritual realities. Through the Lord's Supper we can appropriate the reality not only of what Christ has accomplished for us at the Cross, but also of what He will accomplish for us at His Second Advent. Thus, every Lord's Supper should be viewed as a celebration, not only of Christ's atoning death, but also of His glorious Coming. Just as the Jews end their Passover service with the words, "Next year in Jerusalem!" so we as Christians should close our Lord's Supper with the words: "Our Lord is coming [Maranatha!] (1 Cor 16:22). This eschatological meaning of the Lord's Supper is often ignored. It is therefore imperative for the pastor or the officiating officer to lead the congregation to view each Lord's Supper service as a foretaste of the messianic banquet in God's final Kingdom.

3. The Sabbath

Creation, Redemption, Restoration. Closely related to worship and the Lord's Supper is the celebration of the Sabbath—a divine institution which, like the Lord's Supper, invites us not only to look back, but also to look forward. In several studies I have shown how the weekly seventh-day Sabbath, both in the Bible and in the Judeo-Christian tradition, memorializes not only the past perfect creation and complete redemption, but also the future restoration of both the human and subhuman creation.

In Old Testament times the experience of peace, rest, and liberation which both the weekly and the annual Sabbaths provided to the Jews served to epitomize and nourish the hope of future messianic redemption. Similarly

in the New Testament the “Sabbath rest” that “remains . . . for the people of God” (Heb 4:9) is seen as a physical cessation from work to celebrate not only God’s past creative and redemptive accomplishments, but also His future restoration of this world and of our lives. Through its rich meaning and experience the Sabbath offers both *theological assurance* and *practical opportunities* to nourish and strengthen the Advent Hope.

Theological Assurance

Assurance of Future Rest. Theologically the seventh-day Sabbath nourished our Advent Hope by constantly reassuring us that there is a future “Sabbath rest” that “remains . . . for the people of God” (Heb 4:9). In fact, the Sabbath offers us not only the assurance of the future rest, but it also challenges us to “strive to enter that rest, that no one fall by the same sort of disobedience” (Heb 4:11). The allusion in the latter half of the verse is to those Israelites of the wilderness generation who, because of disobedience, failed to enter into the rest of the land of Canaan—rest of which the Sabbath rest was a type. That experience serves as a warning to us Christians who look forward to the rest of the heavenly Canaan—rest of which the Sabbath is also a type. If, like the wilderness generation, we become unfaithful and disobedient, then we will not enter into the future rest of the heavenly Canaan.

Historical Acceptance. The eschatological meaning of the Sabbath as the symbol of the future rest that awaits God’s people at Christ’s Coming has been widely accepted and taught throughout Christian history. The so-called *Letter of Barnabas* (dated about A.D. 130) offers the earliest example, when it says: “‘And he rested on the seventh day’ means this: When his Son comes and destroys the time of the lawless one, and judges the ungodly and changes the sun and moon and starts, then he will rest well on the seventh day.”⁷ For the author of this letter, then, the seventh day typifies the age (seventh millennium) to be inaugurated by the coming of Christ, who, by destroying evil and establishing righteousness, will bring “everything to rest.”⁸

This future meaning of the Sabbath rest as a symbol of the End-time rest has been held with variations and adaptations by a host of Christian writers such as Justin Martyr, Tertullian, Hippolytus, Cyprian, Origen, Eusebius of Caesarea, Jerome, Augustine, Chrysostom, Peter Lombard, Calvin, and many more.⁹

Augustine’s Eternal Sabbath. Perhaps the most sublime presentation of the Sabbath rest as symbol of the rest and peace that awaits the people of God in the earth made new is to be found in the writings of Augustine (A.D. 354-430). On the last page of the *City of God*, Augustine views the

blessedness of the heavenly city as the ultimate fulfillment of the promised Sabbath rest. “There that precept will find fulfillment: ‘Be still, and know that I am God.’ That will truly be the greatest of Sabbaths; a Sabbath that has no evening, the Sabbath that the Lord approved at the beginning of creation . . . There we shall rest and see, see and love, love and praise.”¹⁰

In his *Confessions*, Augustine earnestly prays for the Sabbath rest and peace which has not sunset: “O Lord God, grant Thy peace unto us, . . . the peace of rest, the peace of the Sabbath, which hath no evening. For all this most beautiful order of things . . . is to pass away, for in them there was morning and evening. But the seventh day is without any evening, nor hath it any setting, because Thou hast sanctified to an everlasting continuance . . . that we may repose in Thee also in the Sabbath of eternal life.”¹¹

An Unresolved Contradiction. It is unfortunate that many Christian thinkers who have accepted, and often spoken eloquently of the symbolic function of the Sabbath as a type of the future and final rest that awaits the people of God have at the same time rejected the validity and value of seventh-day Sabbathkeeping for the present Christian life. One wonders, How can the principle and practice of weekly Sabbathkeeping have terminated with the coming of Christ, when it is still a most valuable symbol of the final rest which still lies in the future?

To accept the Sabbath as the symbol of the *future* rest, while rejecting its *present* observance, is an open contradiction. How can the Sabbath nourish in the believer the hope of the future rest and peace, when its present celebration, which is a foretaste and anticipation of that future rest, is renounced or even denounced? This unilateral interpretation of the Sabbath as an exclusive future reality destroys the organic Biblical unity between the present and the future (temporal and eschatological) functions of the Sabbath. This unresolved contradiction illustrates what happens when the permanency of a divine precept, such as the Fourth Commandment, is tampered with.

The believer who accepts the organic Biblical unity between the present experience of the blessings of the Sabbath and their future consummation at the Second Advent finds in the celebration of the Sabbath a constant theological assurance that there is indeed a future “Sabbath rest” that “remains . . . for the people of God” (Heb 4:9)—a Sabbath rest that will be fully realized when Christ shall come to establish everlasting peace and rest upon this earth.

Practical Opportunities

Divine Presence and Rest. The Sabbath celebration nourishes our Advent Hope by offering us not only theological assurance of the rest and peace of the world to come, but also practical opportunities to experience a foretaste of such blessings. We noted in the previous chapter that a most rewarding aspect of life in the new earth will be an unprecedented experience of the presence of God among His people. “Behold, the dwelling of God is with men. He will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself will be with them” (Rev 21:3).

The Sabbath affords a unique opportunity to experience a foretaste of the divine presence, peace, and rest of the world to come. In a sense the holiness of the Sabbath, spoken of repeatedly in the Scriptures (Ex 16:23; 20:8; 31:15; Deut 5:12; Neh 9:14; Is 58:13; Jer 17:22), consists of the promise God has made on and through this day to manifest in a special way His holy presence in our lives. To hallow the Sabbath means not merely to set aside a weekly day for rest and worship, but to welcome the Lord of the Sabbath, our Savior Jesus Christ, as our invisible and yet very real guest of honor.

God summons us on the Sabbath to be free from work in order that we may be able to cultivate more freely and fully the awareness of His presence and peace in our lives. Through the Sabbath, as eloquently expressed by Thomas Aquinas, God invites us “*ad vacandum divinis*—to have a vacation with Him.”¹²

We can enjoy the Sabbath vacation with God, not only during the formal worship service, but also during the informal activities of the day, because all of them spring out of a heart which has deliberately chosen to honor God on His Holy Day. This spiritual communion that we enjoy with the Lord on the Sabbath nourishes our Advent Hope by offering us a foretaste of the fuller communion we shall enjoy when we shall see Him face to face.

Meeting in Time and Space. The weekly preparation that is made to be ready to welcome the Sabbath, when it arrives at sunset on Friday, in a sense constitutes an incentive to our constant preparation to be ready to welcome the Savior when He comes at the sunset of this world’s history. To put it differently, we might say that our preparation to meet our invisible Lord in *time* on the Sabbath is in a sense a preparation to meet our visible Lord in *space* at His Second Advent.

As Seventh-day Adventists we acknowledge the close link between the Sabbath and the Second Advent in the very name we carry. Our church name indicates that we view these two Biblical doctrines not only as important but

also as interrelated. We believe that to be a *Sabbathkeeper* who welcomes the Savior on His Sabbath day also means to be an *Adventist* who is waiting to welcome the Savior at His Second Advent. Thus the preparation for and the celebration of the Sabbath offer a most effective vehicle to nourish our Advent Hope.

Delighting in God's Creation. Another practical way in which the Sabbath celebration nourishes our Advent Hope is by affording the opportunity to delight in the goodness of God's creation (Is 58:13-14). By inviting us to worship God as our perfect Creator, Redeemer, and ultimate Restorer, the Sabbath offers us not only the time but also the spiritual resources perceptively to enjoy God, people, and things. It invites us to look at the world through the eyes of eternity, that is to say, to view things not merely as they are, but as they must have been originally and as they will be ultimately.

The prevailing materialistic view of this world has resulted in an ethic of exploitation of nature to the extent that we have become aliens in our own habitat. The Sabbath is a movement away from the *exploitation* of nature to its *admiration*. The joyful celebration on the Sabbath of God's creation, redemption, and restoration of all the natural order teaches us to act not as *predators* but as *curators* of the world.¹³ It teaches us to become responsible stewards of God's good creation, since Christ at the End will restore it to its original perfection. Thus it nourishes our Advent Hope by offering us a preparation for and a foretaste of the delight and blessedness of the new world.

4. Witnessing

Our Advent Hope is nourished and strengthened not only through the blessings we receive from corporate worship, the Lord's Supper service, and the Sabbath celebration, but also through the blessings we impart to other as we share with them the good news of a soon-Coming Savior. Biblical truths burn brightly in our consciousness when we share them with others. When we see the comfort, courage, and new meaning which the Advent Hope brings to the lives of those to whom we witness, we ourselves gain a deeper appreciation of its relevance for our own personal life.

The Advent Hope was so deeply felt by New Testament Christians that they coined the password "*Maranatha*—Our Lord is coming" to greet one another (1 Cor 16:22). Such a greeting summed up their Advent Hope and motivated them to share their faith. The Thessalonians, for example, who deeply believed in the imminent Return of Christ (1 Thess 5:1-11; 2 Thess 2:1-12), are commended by Paul for their evangelistic zeal: "You became an example to all believers in Macedonia and Achaia . . . your faith in God has gone forth everywhere, so that we need not say anything" (1 Thess 1:7-8).

Broadcasting Center. This small group of believers, who had only recently been converted from heathenism, had become so inspired by the vision of the soon-Coming Savior that they “sounded forth” the word of their Lord “everywhere”—presumably through Asia Minor and Greece. We might say that Thessalonica became a Christian “broadcasting center.” Thessalonica was an important center of trade situated at the intersection of important highways. Christian merchants of Thessalonica must have carried with them in their journeys the treasure of the Gospel together with their merchandise. They did not keep to themselves the good news of the Savior who had come to save all people from sin and who is coming again to take the saved home to His eternal fellowship.

The experience of the Thessalonians has often been repeated in the course of history. The proclamation of the imminent return of Christ has brought about not only religious awakenings, but also a renewed sense of urgency to reach out to the whole world with the good news of salvation. Seventh-day Adventists are a case in point. This church grew out of the Advent awakenings of the 1840’s. The firm belief in Christ’s imminent Return has affected not only their lifestyle, by inspiring Seventh-day Adventists to healthful and holy living, but also their sense of mission, by giving a sense of urgency to their global evangelistic outreach. To the degree that the Advent Hope affects our Christian living and motivates our witnessing, to the same degree such a hope is nourished and strengthened within our hearts.

5. The Advent Signs

The Advent Hope is nourished also by what we have called the Advent signs. Without recognizable signs we lose hope of reaching our destination. This is true whether we travel by car on cement highways or by faith on the Christian highway to the Kingdom. Christ was cognizant of the human need for signs which could nourish our hope of His imminent Return. Thus He gave several signs foreshadowing His Return. In chapters 8, 9, and 10 we examined at length the various Advent signs and their unprecedented fulfillment in our time. We noted that these signs nourish our Advent Hope, not by *pinpointing* the exact time of Christ’s Return, but by *pointing* toward its certainty and nearness.

Some signs, such as the worldwide Gospel proclamation (Mark 13:10), nourish our Advent Hope by reassuring Adventists that God is bringing about the consummation of redemption to be realized at the Second Advent. Other signs, such as earthquakes, tornadoes, floods, famines, and pestilences (Mark 13:8; Luke 21:11) sustain our Advent Hope by constantly reminding us of the final divine judgment upon human wickedness which Christ will execute at

His Coming. The latter signs also have a message for unbelievers, summoning them to repent and be saved before it is forever too late.

Constant Readiness. The Advent signs, the fulfillment of which we constantly observe, strengthen our Advent Hope, not by informing us about the exact time or manner of Christ's Return, but by encouraging us to be constantly ready for this event. The keynote of the whole Olivet Discourse is: "Watch therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is Coming" (Matt 24:42; cf. vv. 43, 44; 25:13). This constant readiness has been encouraged by the generic nature of the signs of the End which, as noted in chapter 7, have found a degree of fulfillment in every age.

The intensification which we see in our times of the sign of divine grace, manifested in the worldwide Gospel proclamation (Mark 13:10), of the signs of human rebellion evidenced in the proliferation of antichristian theologies and ideologies, military conflicts among nations, and growth of lawlessness (Mark 13:6-9), and of the signs of divine judgment, revealed through calamities such as earthquakes, tornadoes, floods, famines, and pestilences (Mark 13:8; Luke 21:11)—all of these are to believers today a constant reminder that "the coming of the Lord is at hand . . . the Judge is standing at the doors" (James 5:8-9).

CONCLUSION

The Advent Hope, nourished in our hearts, greatly affects our motives, our values, our choices, in short, our total lifestyle. We have seen that to be an Adventist Christian means, among other things, to live with a forward look, laboring in this world while looking forward to the world to come. It means keeping Christ at the center of our existence. It means to live by the 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, prayer life, unfailing love, and courage.

To nourish and strengthen the Advent Hope in our hearts, God has provided us with vital resources such as worship, the Lord's Supper, the Sabbath, witnessing, and the Advent signs. The worship experience can nourish our Advent Hope by enabling us to transcend the unpleasant realities of this present life and to catch a glimpse of the blessedness of the world to come. The Lord's Supper can sustain our Advent Hope by inviting us to look not only backward to Christ's Passion but also forward to His Parousia.

The Sabbath can nourish our Advent Hope by offering us a theological reassurance of the "Sabbath rest" that "remains . . . for the people of God"

(Heb 4:9), and practical opportunities to experience a foretaste of future rest, peace, and delight. Witnessing gives us a deeper appreciation of the relevance of the Advent Hope, as we see the comfort, courage, and transformation that such Hope brings to the lives of others. Finally, the Advent signs are intended to nourish our Advent Hope by constantly reassuring us of the certainty and imminence of Christ's Return and by encouraging us to be constantly ready to receive Him.

Among all the things that are difficult to comprehend in the Scriptures, the Advent Hope stands out for its clarity, centrality, and certainty. Its certainty rests on Christ's first Advent, which constitutes the center from which the line of salvation-history runs backwards through the covenant people to creation, and forward through the mission of the Church to the Second Advent and the final restoration. The Return of Christ in glory is presented in the Scriptures as the consummation of God's creative and redemptive purpose for individual persons and for the whole universe.

Without the Advent Hope our lives would be deprived of meaning and comfort. Motivation would be weak or even lacking "to live sober, upright, and godly lives" (Titus 2:12) among the problems, pain, and perversions of this present world. The promise of eternal life without the Second Advent would be like a staircase leading nowhere, or like a large check drawn on a fundless account. The glorious Coming of Christ is a necessity if our Christian life is to have meaning, courage, comfort, motivation, and hope for a better life to come. Without the *Advent Hope* there would only be *Human Hopelessness*. Let us thank God that

We have this hope that burns within our hearts,
Hope in the coming of the Lord.
We have this faith that Christ alone imparts,
Faith in the promise of His Word.
We believe the time is here,
When the nations far and near
Shall awake, and shout, and sing
Hallelujah! Christ is King!
We have this hope that burns within our hearts.
Hope in the coming of the Lord.¹⁴

Amen. Come, Lord Jesus! (Rev 22:20)

Maranatha!

NOTES TO CHAPTER 16

1. Stephen Travis, *The Jesus Hope* (London, 1974), p. 99.
2. Cited by A. Outler, *John Wesley* (New York, 1964), p. 378
3. Emphasis supplied.
4. Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ* (Mountain View, California, 1954), p. 95.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 100.
6. Emphasis supplied.
7. *The Letter of Barnabas* 15, 8-9, trans. Edgar J. Goodspeed, *The Apostolic Fathers* (New York, 1950), p. 40.
8. *Ibid.*
9. The comments of these and other writers are cited and discussed in my Italian doctoral dissertation, *Un Esame dei Testi Biblici e Patristici dei Primi Quattro Secoli allo Scopo d'Accertare il Tempo e le Cause del Sorgere della Domenica come Giorno del Signore* (Rome, Pontifical Gregorian University, 1974), pp. 233-257.
10. *City of God*, book 22, chapter 30.
11. *The Confessions of St. Augustine* 13, 35-36, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, First Series (Grand Rapids, 1979), vol. 1, p. 207.
12. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* (New York, 1947), vol. 2, question 122, article 4, 1, p. 1701.
13. The ecological function of the Sabbath is discussed in my book, *Divine Rest for Human Restlessness* (Rome, 1980), pp. 204-214.
14. This hymn was composed and set to music by Wayne Hooper. It was adopted as the theme song of the 1985 World Congress of the Seventh-day Adventists, held in New Orleans, Louisiana. The hymn is found in *The Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal* (Washington, D.C., 1985), no. 214.

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