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### Quotations

#### Sacred Scripture

Unless otherwise specified, throughout this entire assessment I employ the **New International Version** (NIV) – 1990 British edition – for all such quotations, with all emphases supplied personally.

#### Ellen White Corpus

With very rare exceptions, dictated by decades of writing prior to cyberspace, I likewise adopt the standard abbreviations for the Ellen White writings listed @ [www.whiteestate.org/cdrom/bib-stan](http://www.whiteestate.org/cdrom/bib-stan).

#### DARCOM Apologia

Reference to the Daniel and Revelation Committee's seven-volume apologia for exclusive Seventh-day Adventist dogma is facilitated by the labels **DARCOM 1-7**.

They all share the details: ed. F.B. Holbrook; Biblical Research Institute:

DARCOM 1: Shea, W. H., *Selected Studies on Prophetic Interpretation* (Silver Spring, 1992<sup>2</sup>).

DARCOM 2: *Symposium on Daniel: Introductory & Exegetical Studies* (Washington, 1986).

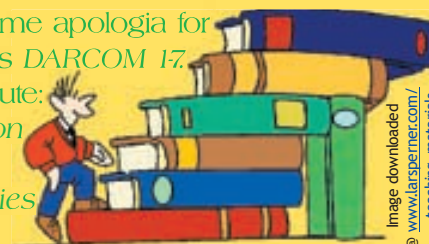
DARCOM 3: *The Seventy Weeks, Leviticus, and the Nature of Prophecy* (Washington, 1986).

DARCOM 4: *Issues in the Book of Hebrews*, (Silver Spring, 1989).

DARCOM 5: *Doctrine of the Sanctuary: a Historical Survey (1845-1863)* (Silver Spring, 1989).

DARCOM 6: *Symposium on Revelation: Introductory & Exegetical Studies, Book 1* (Silver Spring, 1992).

DARCOM 7: *Symposium on Revelation: Exegetical & General Studies, Book 2* (Silver Spring, 1992).



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## *“Signs of the Times” – How Biblical is Seventh-day Adventism’s Historicist Interpretation of Jesus’ Olivet Discourse?*

If analysts were to itemise the subject matter of Seventh-day Adventist sermons and publications in any typical year across a dozen languages from Alaska to Australia, Jesus Christ’s Olivet Discourse<sup>1</sup> would be very high on every list of their frequent topics. Moreover, time and again Seventh-day Adventism expounds it primarily in historicist terms as *an unbroken sequence of temporal waymarks*, or “signs of the times”<sup>2</sup>, between his First and Second Advents, *specifically* designed increasingly to proclaim the latter’s imminence.

The Olivet Discourse is a *crucial* consideration, therefore, in any adequate evaluation of Seventh-day Adventism’s paramount principle of prophetic interpretation,<sup>3</sup> even though it is mentioned only passingly in Dr. Desmond Ford’s epochal critique of some of his Church’s defining dogma<sup>4</sup> and the DARCOM response.<sup>5</sup> For it is merely incidental to its defense of its principal dogma, a pre-Advent judgment beginning in 1844.<sup>6</sup>

At first sight, Seventh-day Adventism’s ardent preachers appear to have it right regarding “the signs of the times”. With some newspaper in one hand and their Bible in the other, they parade this planet’s woes as the *precise* fulfilment of Jesus’ forecast. Wars, famines, earthquakes, Mt. 24:6f. – *he is about to return!* With equal conviction such preachers look to the heavens. On May 19, 1780 the sun grew dark early, *just* as 29 had predicted. Nor was any eclipse responsible. That night’s moon rose blood-red, *precisely* as forecast, moreover, especially in light of John’s more replete details in Rev. 6:12. Likewise, on November 13, 1833, the night sky was shattered by a vast, sustained meteoric shower – *exactly* as Mt. 24:29 had also prophesied.

However, appearances can be downright deceptive, especially in such end-time speculations as occupy so many conservative Christians! In fact, sometimes their triumphal cry “It fits!” rings forth from different groups, almost in unison, even though they view entirely *different* events as fulfilling the *same* predictive detail.<sup>7</sup> The only safe procedure is to search for no such accomplishment until this extremely basic question has been answered with the most meticulous care: What does Jesus’ prophecy *actually* predict?

### *The Olivet Discourse*

#### *Setting*

Christ’s disciples once directed his attention to the Temple’s buildings, Mt. 24:1. “What massive stones! What magnificent buildings!”, Mk. 13:1. His response was as startling as it was succinct – “not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down”, Mt. 24:2. In other words, the utterly unthinkable would transpire. That beautiful Temple, now around 50 years in the building, Jn. 2:20, would be demolished altogether! Surely, therefore, Jerusalem itself, and perhaps the very nation, would be destroyed.

Actually, this was no novel idea. According to Matthew, the Discourse followed hard upon the heels of Jesus’ rejection of his stubborn city, 23:37f. His forecast of doom cannot be mistaken: “Fill up the measure of the sin of your forefathers!... How will you escape being condemned to hell?... (U)pon you will come all the righteous blood that has been shed on earth... Look, your house is left to you desolate”, 32f., 35, 38. Here, too, is a clear allusion to his Return: “(Y)ou will not see me again until you say, “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord””, 39. This vague connexion between Jerusalem’s judgment and the End has an extremely important bearing on interpreting the ensuing Discourse, as we will observe shortly.

But first, some crucial preliminary considerations are very reliable pointers to that interpretation.

The distinct inference is that Jesus’ disciples were wrestling from the outset with the sheer horror of his extremely explosive prediction. What gigantic stones! What striking beauty! How could all of this *possibly* be destroyed? Nevertheless, their confidence in their beloved Master was quite sufficient for them to pose the paramount question(s) upon which his entire arresting Discourse is remarkably firmly founded.

#### *The Disciples’ Question(s)*

According to Matthew, the disciples ask, “when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?”, 24:3. At first sight, therefore, they appear to have two issues in mind, the demise of the Temple and Jesus’ Return. This has induced many sincere interpreters to view his response as *a twofold prediction only partially relevant to his day*. For instance, Seventh-day Adventism’s most respected spokesperson claims that he did not treat the Fall of Jerusalem and his Return separately.

He mingled the description of these two events. Had He opened to His disciples future events as He beheld them, they would have been unable to endure the sight. In mercy to them He blended the description of the two great crises, leaving the disciples to study out the meaning for themselves. When He referred to the destruction of Jerusalem, His prophetic words reached beyond that event to the final conflagration in that day when the Lord shall rise out of His place to punish

the world for their iniquity, when the earth shall disclose her blood, and shall no more cover her slain. This entire discourse was given, not for the disciples only, but for those who should live in the last scenes of this earth's history.<sup>8</sup>

It is downright tempting to classify such sentiments as merely the natural fruitage of an era of theological immaturity and imprecision. Nevertheless, as D. Carson, himself a respected NT commentator, documents, among conservative exegetes, this is “the most common approach—and that of most evangelicals today.”<sup>9</sup>

However, the reader's salient question remains: Did Jesus' disciples actually pose *two* distinct questions?

Luke reports them thus: “when will these things happen? And what will be *the* sign that they are about to take place?”, 21:7. Mark even refers to “*the* sign that they are all about to be fulfilled”, 13:4. True, Matthew alone mentions the Parousia explicitly. Yet *the sign in all three synoptic Gospels is singular*. Clearly, then, the doom of the Temple is so climactic that these disciples can only associate it with Jesus' Return. In effect, *they have only one question, not two*. Indeed, this deduction accords well with the fact that this dialogue springs from his solemn warning of judgment in the context of his Parousia, as we have already noticed.

This is a very firm basis for plumbing Christ's protracted response. First, though, the thesis of a melded prediction falters on one final, sweeping problem. As Carson demonstrates,<sup>10</sup> it is impossible to unravel the Discourse to separate the details relevant in turn to the Fall of Jerusalem and to the Parousia. That is, our Lord threw away his interpretive key, despite his compassion – *unless there never was any necessity for it*.

### The Beginning of Birth Pains

At last it is time to consider Jesus' protracted reply to his disciples' anxious question(s). When will the End take place? And what will be its *single* sign? Surprisingly, he first appears to ignore their concerns entirely. Many deceptive false Christs will arise, and reports and rumours of wars will abound, Mt. 24:4-6. Regardless, he directs, “see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is *still* to come”, 6. Or, as Luke reports it, “the end will *not* come right away”, 21:9. He also records another decisive detail. One of the false Christs' delusive claims will be that ““(t)he time is near””, 8. So this assertion is certainly included in Jesus' instant embargo: “Do not follow them.” Obviously, *his Return would not then be imminent!*

In effect, Christ's initial response is, **Not for some time**. However, his disciples are earnestly seeking his sign of the End. Manifestly, then, in mentioning spurious Messiahs and wars, Jesus decisively excludes *all* such events from that singular sign! They will take place. But the End will still be future as they transpire.

Regardless, as my study proceeds, I will confirm that Jesus did “detail” the time of his Return. Moreover, there will be some precursors, at least: “[W]hen you see all these things, you know that it is near, right at the door”, Mt. 24:33.<sup>11</sup> Hardly surprisingly, then, even the events he labels “not yet” have at least some tenuous nexus with his Return. Looking back to the false Christs, war, famine and earthquakes, 4-7, he terms them all “the beginning of birth-pains”, 8. The connexion, such as it is, inheres in Jesus' striking metaphor.

In the Rabbinic writings of his era, *birthpangs of the Messiah* was a technical term for the trauma launching the Messianic Age of bliss.<sup>12</sup> But in the OT, the simile of a woman in labour has two salient yet distinct senses. On one hand, it depicts the anguish of those awaiting their nation's demise — especially Yahweh's people before the Babylonian Captivity, Jer. 6:24.<sup>13</sup> On the other, at times it pictures their hope of return from captivity, Isa. 66:8.<sup>14</sup> If possible, context will decide between these options as Jesus mouths the expression.

The closest relevant event, as we will note, is the Fall of Jerusalem. So the events launching his list must presage that disaster, at least. The trouble is, as we will also observe, the other surpassing event close at hand is Christ's Return. And it will be by far the greatest restoration of all. Dogmatism over the precise purport of our Lord's use of *birth pains* is therefore rather futile. Perhaps he had *both* climactic events in mind.

The significant point is this. The events which head his list do not signal the End that troubles his disciples. They are nothing more than “the *beginning* of birth-pains.” The “birth” itself will take place. However, in answering their anxious question, When?, Jesus' very graphic metaphor by no means modifies his own cautionary label, **Not yet**. Carson succinctly summarises Christ's intent here. The effect of these verses is

not to curb enthusiasm for the Lord's return but to warn against false claimants and an expectation of a premature return based on misconstrued signs.<sup>15</sup>

All very well. But precisely when does Christ answer their burning question? Certainly not until Mt. 24:14. For in 9-13 he forecasts persecution in the midst of apostasy and deceit. Hence his counsel, 13, to endure until the End. This is strongly confirmed in that, according to Lu. 21:12, this persecution actually begins before the events heading Matthew's list. Our Lord's dramatic proclamation, “this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations;” Mt. 24:14, fortifies my conclusion, too. For it is here at long last – never before, please observe – that he finally announces, “*then* the end will come.”

In brief, then, Jesus does not answer his disciples' question(s) immediately. Rather, he first mentions typical disturbing events – some of which will engulf believers – which might very easily be mistaken for that *solitary* sign they are seeking. Earthquakes are especially noteworthy in this regard as a *consequence of global dynamics as old as the earth itself*.<sup>16</sup> So, as carefully as emphatically, he labels *all* of them, **Not yet!**

## Broad Chronology

The striking change of pace in Jesus' forecast at Mt. 24:15 is simply impossible to miss. This is signalled by *so* (οὕτως (*oun*)), the conjunction of consequence at the very outset of the entire section, binding it firmly to the gospel proclamation above. In this second major section, these following events are listed in order:

- the desecration of the Temple, 15, as Jerusalem is routed, Lu. 21:20;
- the Christians' flight to the mountains in haste, Mt. 24:16-18;
- the Great Tribulation, 2022;
- false Christs and pseudo-prophets working deceptive miracles, 2328;
- "signs in the sun, moon and stars", Lu. 21:25f., as listed in Mt. 24:29, although the former includes broad, earthly upheavals as well;
- Christ's Return in power and glory, 30f.

The paramount temporal point for my complete study is that *all six of these events are bound together extremely tightly indeed*. This is achieved largely by Jesus' repeated use of the single Greek adverb **τότε** (*tote*). Basically, *tote* means *then*, with the specific nuance *at that time* or *immediately after*. For example, the persecution of Mt. 24:9 has a tragic outcome. "At that time (*tote*) many will turn away from the faith", 10. There is absolutely no hint here of the lapse of any significant time. Rather, **immediacy** is the manifest message.

Note that, as though it were its very backbone, *tote* appears seven times, effectively, in the passage 15:31:

- "when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, *then* know that its desolation has come near", Lu. 21:20, RSV;<sup>17</sup>
- "*then* let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains", Mt. 24:16;
- "*then* there will be great distress," 21;
- "At that time if anyone says to you, "Look, here is the Christ!" or, "There he is!" do not believe it", 23;
- "At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky," 30;
- "*then* all the tribes of the earth will mourn," 30, RSV;
- "*then* he will send out the angels, and gather his elect from the four winds," Mk. 13:27, RSV.

First, however, countless cautions of the peril of preconceived opinion come to mind from the annals of Seventh-day Adventist interpretations of this passage. One example must suffice, especially salient in view of its apologetical birth.<sup>18</sup> W. R. L. Scragg quotes Mt. 24:14, then notices that *then* raises the question of time:

How long? you ask—only to be told that no human knows the day or the hour. While we aren't told the day nor [*sic*] the hour, Jesus certainly encouraged us to think in terms of time. If you doubt that time is important, read carefully through Matthew 24 and note the use of "then," "at that time," "when." Such expressions occur at least a dozen times...

... Nothing suggests that we have any right to spiritualise or deny the historic context of the signs. Therefore, we're correct and Scriptural when we call these "signs of the times"..<sup>19</sup>

Of course we have no right to deny the historic context of this any other scriptural passage. Nor, though, should we ride roughshod over the clearest possible evidence, as Scragg certainly does. For instance, it is surely impossible, if we read this passage with the care he wisely advocates, to miss the sense of **immediacy** in *tote* in the first, second, sixth and last verses in the list above. The third stands resolutely beside these four, too, in view of *for* (γάρ (*gar*)), the causal conjunction preceding this adverb in Mt. 24:21. In terms, then, of both literary structure and sheer consistency, there can be very little doubt whatever that, in the remaining two verses on this list, *tote* has *precisely the same contiguous* sense as in all of the others.

A second temporal adverb, **εὐθέως** (*eutheōs*), also has an extremely forceful bearing upon the interpretation of this passage, even though it appears once alone in Jesus' complete Olivet Discourse, in Mt. 24:29:

- "Immediately after the distress of those days..."

Beyond reasonable doubt, the distress in Jesus' mind is the Great Tribulation which he mentions in 21f., as the expression "those days", 19, 22, clearly attests. Along with other terminal events on his list, this warrants comment in its own right. It will receive this scrutiny shortly. For now, *eutheōs* serves two closely related, broad temporal functions. It confirms that *tote* expresses immediacy. And in reaching back over the false Christs and prophets, it identifies Jesus' second list as *a sequence of rapid-fire eschatological events*.

These broad deductions are verified repeatedly in his main details, as in this following sweeping survey.

## The Fall of Jerusalem

In predicting the defilement of the Temple which launched his entire Discourse, Jesus refers to the Book of Daniel, Mt. 24:15. Temporally, this has a twofold, cohesive impact upon the interpretation of Jesus' entire forecast. First, it attests that he thought his own era was the last. For his edict, "let the reader **understand**", 15, implies decisively that this book was open in his day. For it had been sealed "until the time of the end", Dan. 12:4, 9, quite specifically so that its major forecasts could not be comprehended in the interim. Indeed, those with access to the Greek will observe his *specific* reference to the Septuagint of Daniel's passage.<sup>20</sup>

Secondly, Christ has good cause to mention “the abomination that causes desolation”, Mt. 24:15. This expression appears twice in Daniel,<sup>2</sup> although 8:11-13 is also pertinent. As I have demonstrated already,<sup>22</sup> this sacrilege would occur under the tyranny of the Little Horn, 9-12. To be precise, it would take place just before the time of the End, while Daniel’s book was still sealed. Already, therefore, some slight divergence is apparent between his prediction and Jesus’ interpretation. However, this by no means suffices to challenge the transparent fact that Christ expected this desecration to transpire within the very shadow of his Return.

Moreover, this accords perfectly with the consistent temporal data already to hand that our Lord’s climactic Parousia was originally scheduled to follow hard upon the heels of the Fall of Jerusalem. Some of my readers will probably object here that Lu. 21:24 implies the passing of centuries. Yet every detail *could* have taken place in mere decades. The only valid method of Bible study is the meticulous desire to know what God’s inspired text really says. If “the times of the Gentiles” which Jesus mentions here have any specific duration, it is 42 months, Rev. 11:2. As I have already demonstrated,<sup>23</sup> this is literal time – a mere 3½ years.

### The Great Tribulation

Our Lord also appeals directly to Daniel in predicting the Great Tribulation in Mt. 24:21. For Dan. 12:1 has his caution about “a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then.” Close context indicates that this will occur in the time of the End.<sup>24</sup> Jesus virtually quotes these words then adds, “and never to be equalled again”, Mt. 24:21. He therefore declares the event to be quite unique. There can be only **one** tribulation greater than all before or since it in history’s vast panorama of passing events!

Naturally, therefore, Christ is speaking about the time of the End once more. This places the Christians’ flight to the mountains, too, within this time of the End. For he expresses his concern for nursing mothers and the pregnant “in *those* days”, 19. And he asks his disciples to pray that their flight be spared the difficulties of both winter and the Sabbath, 20. The cause is simple. “For *then* (*tote*) there will be great distress.”<sup>21</sup> Here the causal conjunction *for* (γάρ (*gar*)) certainly binds the Great Tribulation to the flight. So the latter, just like the former, was originally scheduled to take place immediately prior to our Lord’s climactic Return.

### Heavenly Signs

Thus far Jesus has been remarkably silent about the second half of his disciples’ question, What sign? Indeed, the very first time he mentions *sign* is in Lu. 21:11, “great signs from heaven.” At first sight it may appear that these are certainly at home in his “Not yet” list. Rather, his purpose is clear in 25: “There will be signs in the sun, moon and stars.” With the addition of the clause, “the heavenly bodies will be shaken”, 26, his list as in Mt. 24:29 is complete, in precise order at that. Yet this prime question remains: What did he mean by his signs? The Dark Day and Night of May 19, 1780 and the meteor shower of November 13, 1833?

Scarcely! *How can events spanning more than two centuries possibly presage an imminent Parousia!*

Occasionally Seventh-day Adventism even concedes that some, at least, of its precious “signs” were absolutely natural phenomena of extremely limited scope. For instance, the Dark Day was caused by forest fires restricted to the New England region of the United States of America.<sup>25</sup> By no means was it a *supernatural, global* portent for **every** Christian to behold in wonder, as Christ’s Olivet Discourse certainly implies!

Regardless, the huge tenacity of this sectarian tradition is well illustrated by a minor doctrinal crisis which recently tested Seventh-day Adventist damage control policy. A loyal cleric queried the “signs of the times” reading of Mt. 24 in his local Church paper.<sup>26</sup> This drew an “immediate, widespread and intense reaction”.<sup>27</sup> Its Editor regretted his absence at the time, permitting a partially edited essay through, and apologised for publishing the author’s “quite tentative suggestions as authoritative statements.”<sup>28</sup> And, before his bemused readers could pause for breath, asking whether his apology really reflects the author’s obvious sentiments, he attempted to smooth ruffled feathers with a conciliatory editorial which planted one foot in each camp.<sup>29</sup>

Enter Walter Scragg, the Division President, renowned amongst Seventh-day Adventists as an extremely rare administrator relatively well informed about cardinal theological issues. Swapping his executive cap for his erudite hat, Scragg closed the lid on the debate quickly and firmly. Probably his final article before retirement was as traditional a reiteration of the “signs of the times” thesis as one will find in Seventh-day Adventist circles, despite his perceptive stress upon Jesus himself as God’s sign, and his Return as *the* sign.

Scragg’s title says it all: “Looking for the Waymarks”.<sup>30</sup> Suffice it to say that he reaffirms the Dark Day, the falling stars and even that Lisbon earthquake way back on November 1, 1755 as prophetic waymarks between Jesus’ First and Second Advents. The trouble is, sacred Scripture teaches no such naïve nonsense.

First of all, setting out Mt. 24:29 as it appears, in effect, in the original Greek, with all emphasis supplied: **Immediately** after the distress of those days –

- the sun will be darkened **and**
- the moon will not give its light **and**
- the stars will fall from the sky **and**
- the heavenly bodies will be shaken,

manifestly, *all four ethereal events occur in unison*, hard on the heels of that Great Tribulation. There is no room for a sequence of scattered portents starting in 1780 and still incomplete today, almost 225 years later.

Secondly, God's Word itself identifies these signs clearly. The OT often links the darkening of the sun and moon, as in Isa. 13:10,<sup>31</sup> and the falling of the stars, as in 34:4, with the judgment at the Day of Yahweh. *They are always a cluster of portents, never a sequence spanning the centuries.* Why should Mt. 24:29 differ? Indeed, in the Greek 29 comes very close to being a *conflation* of the relevant portions of these two verses!

In brief, these heavenly signs cluster hard upon the heels of that Great Tribulation, just before Christ returns. So they add further solid evidence to all of the consistent data placing it near the Fall of Jerusalem.

### The Sign of the Son of Man

Yet even this does not address the second half of the disciples' query. For their precise concern is, "what will be *the sign of your coming...?*", Mt. 24:3. It is no fortuity that Jesus' reply peaks in his assurance: "*the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky,*" 30. For *the only sign that really counts is his actual Return.* He was to return soon after Jerusalem's Fall. In so short a time, *no* "waymarks" would be needed! In contrast, the "signs of the times" ideology cannot sidestep this striking enigma. If this portion of the Olivet Discourse genuinely lists a timetable of signs which progressively count down to Christ's Parousia, why is his Return itself one of these signs, let alone the *only* one precisely matching his disciples' specific question?

### The Lesson from the Fig Tree

"But what about that fig tree?", I hear many astute Seventh-day Adventists protest. "Don't you realise that Jesus gave all these signs to warn us when his Return is near?" Actually, that is not quite the "lesson from the fig tree", Mt. 24:32, he intended. Granted, "when you see *all these things*,... it is... *right at the door*", 33. Yet the crucial question is, What things? For one salient event, at least, is beyond *all* – the Return itself.<sup>32</sup> A keen acuity to context is crucial, then, if Jesus' "simple" lesson from nature's realm is to be analysed aright.

I submit that the evidence distinctly excludes Jesus' initial list of events, 4-13, from portents of his looming Return. Remember his caution, for instance, that one of the deceptive claims of the false Christs would be: "The time is near", Lu. 21:8. The simplest and most plausible means I know of making sense of *all these things*, in view of such possible contradictions, is to confine them to the sequence of rapid-fire events of Mt. 24:15-29. That is, *the Fall of Jerusalem was initially intended to be the first actual precursor of Christ's Return.*

The other impassable hurdle for devotees of the "signs of the times" notion is the simple verb *see* (ὁρᾶν (*horān*)). No "exegetical" squirming will alter the manifest fact that those who view the Parousia will "*see all these things*" *personally*, just as they will see Jesus return in glory, 30. It is quite outrageous to insist that if I live to witness his Parousia, I will see the last signs *literally*. Yet I must cast my *spiritual* eye of discernment all of the way back, for instance, to May 19, 1780, to "see" the Dark Day as just as much a sign, too.

### This Generation

The point to which we now turn is so significant, although it is often ignored, in effect, that Jesus hammers it home with this forceful affirmation, "I tell you the truth, *this generation* will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened", 34. Carson's confident conclusion here is certainly beyond quibble:

"This generation"... can only with the greatest difficulty be made to mean anything other than the generation living when Jesus spoke... [T]o make "this generation" refer to all believers in every age, or the generation of believers alive when eschatological events start to happen, is highly artificial.<sup>33</sup>

Indeed, the NT mentions *that* generation, Heb. 3:10, *other* generations, Eph. 3:5, and *all* generations, 21.<sup>34</sup> Therefore the pronoun *this* really does mean *this* in the NT, even when it is applied to the noun *generation*.

The expression *this generation* is employed at least a dozen times in the three synoptic Gospels, ignoring parallels.<sup>35</sup> And without one single exception, our Lord has his contemporaries in mind. For example, in comparing the Jews' rejection of both himself and John the Baptist, Mt. 11:18f., he laments: "To what can I compare *this generation?*", 16. It would be arrant nonsense to apply such texts to humanity in general, or specifically to our own generation. How, then, can 24:34 possibly be the solitary exception upon his lips?

In sum, *Jesus addressed his own pristine disciples – from first to last – in his Olivet Discourse.* He did not predict the full course of Christian history for long centuries to come, even broadly, or leap across the millennia to our day. Originally, he *intended* to return *immediately* following the catastrophic Fall of Jerusalem.

### Keep Watch

Except for Mt. 25:31-46, which depicts the judgment at Christ's Return, the rest of his Olivet Discourse may be subsumed completely, with forceful interpretive impact, under this single, simple heading: **Keep watch.**

First: "No one knows about that day or hour... but only the Father", 24:36. Noah's Flood offers a superb parallel, 37:39. Life's daily duties will be stalled in the very act, 40f.! This is the foundation of Christ's repetitious warning: "Therefore keep watch, because *you do not know on what day your Lord will come*", 42.

Secondly, Jesus illustrates the uncertainty over the time of his Return by stating that a thief arrives unannounced, 43. His caution therefore sounds this higher note of urgency: “you must also be ready, because *the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him*”, 44! This counsel, repeated in 50, now forms the basis of an appeal for moral fortitude, 45-51 – especially if his Return appears to be delayed, 48.

Such additional details of morality and seeming delay undergird Christ’s famous parable of those ten virgins, 25:1-2, although his admonition reverts to its fundamental form, 13. Likewise, his parable of the talents, 14:30, deals with the fidelity of the saints awaiting their Master’s return in the context of his apparent delay – “After a long time the master... returned”, 19. Here, however, Jesus’ routine admonition is implicit, not explicit.

In all, therefore, here is a portion of Christ’s Olivet Discourse which is almost twice as long of that which most directly answers his disciples’ dual query. His simple, repeated caution is: “*You do not know when I will return. In fact, I will return when you do not expect me. So keep watch while you serve me faithfully.*”

Why, though, does Jesus answer his disciples’ question, When?, only to insist, “I will come when you do **not** expect me”? His allusion to a delayed Return may resolve this enigma. Yet it is hard to be definitive until we are perfectly clear about what *he* meant by this delay, especially with the benefit of hindsight. More here anon. For now, his caveat, “I will return **unexpectedly**”, *almost twice as frequent as mention of the time*, dispels every notion of waymarks. The “signs of the times” thesis suffers another vast credibility crisis here.

### ***Disappointed Expectations***

The fact that Jesus *taught* his pristine followers to expect his Return in their day is well attested in the remainder of the NT. A survey of its primary passages is apropos, beginning with those authors who, by a very long measure, were best able to report the facts – the three **eyewitnesses** to his Discourse, Mk. 13:3.

First, Peter rationalised the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost by quoting Joel 2:28-32: “*In the last days... I will pour out my Spirit*”, Acts 2:17. This is explicable only if this senior apostle was convinced that he really was living in earth’s closing years. Passing time did not alter his conviction, either. Jesus “was revealed *in these last times*”, 1 Pet. 1:20. And his assured response to the mocking, “Where is this “coming” he promised?”, 2 Pet. 3:4, was quite decisive: “*In the last days scoffers will come*”, 3.<sup>36</sup> Their ridicule itself bespoke the time of the Parousia! Compare Peter’s simple caution, “(t)he end of all things is **near**”, 1 Pet. 4:7.

James, the second of Jesus’ select auditors, censured the greedy thus: “You have hoarded wealth *in the last days*”, James 5:3. Far more striking, however, is his general appeal: “Be patient... until the Lord’s coming... (B)e patient and stand firm, because the Lord’s coming is **near**... The Judge is standing *at the door!*”, 7:9. Perhaps he had Jesus’ words in Mt. 24:33 specifically in mind here, even if “all these things” were not yet on display as he wrote. Whatever, at very least, his unmistakable, fundamental message is *imminence*.

John, the third of Christ’s favourites, displayed the tenacity of his faith, too, with his single, simple assertion, “**this is the last hour**”, 1 Jn. 2:18, in the context of those many antichrists who had **already** arrived upon the scene.<sup>37</sup> Moreover, observe that John’s temporal noun *hour* (ὥρα (*hōra*)) does not readily connote *era*.

Moving beyond those specifically privileged to audit Christ’s Olivet Discourse personally, Paul likewise asserted: “The night is **nearly** over; the day is **almost** here”, Ro. 13:12. The towering apostle also insisted that “*the time is short*... For this world in its present form is **passing away**”, 1 Cor. 7:29, 31.<sup>38</sup> And, in counselling his timid disciple Timothy *personally*,<sup>39</sup> he warned: “There will be terrible times *in the last days*”, 2 Tim. 3:1.

One of Paul’s major statements merits separate attention. In the earliest piece of NT literature, our apostle faced a unique pastoral problem. His Thessalonian flock were becoming alarmed by the demise of some of their fellows, 1 Thess. 4:13. This shattered their belief that all of them would be alive when Jesus returned. Then had their deceased forfeited eternal bliss? With the resurrection in sharp focus, Paul consoled them thus: “(W)e who are **still alive**, who are **left till the coming of the Lord**, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep”, 15. Rather, “the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are **still alive and are left** will be caught up together with them... to meet the Lord in the air”, 16f. In fact, this lengthy passage closes as its fundamental, pastoral theme of support, 18, recurs in 5:11. Between these uniform, specific references, Paul highlighted only the single subject, alertness because of the **imminence** of Christ’s punitive Parousia.

The pastoral crisis spawning the epistle to the Hebrews was far more serious. The converts from Judaism were on the verge of forfeiting their very salvation, as 2:1-4 and 3:7-4:11 all too forcefully reveal. A fearful warning like 5:11-6:12 or 10:26f. says it all! Striving to avert this utter tragedy, the author reminded his flock of their former stalwart hope, 10:32-34. Beyond the slightest quibble, then, his following words were spoken to his own *contemporaries*: “*In just a very little while*, ‘he who is coming will come and will not **delay**’”, 37.

*Per se*, this is as transparent a token as you will ever find that *pristine Christians were taught that Christ would return in their day*. They did not simply *assume* so! Yet there is far more to the matter than that. Behind *delay* is the Greek verb *χρονίζεω* (*chronizein*). The fact that it recurs four more times alone in the entire NT, *always in its Gospels*, is extremely significant. In Mt. 24:48 this is the very verb which allows for a delay in Christ’s Parousia. In 25:5 we observe the identical nuance. Compare 19, where the cognate noun

χρόνος (*chronos*) serves like function. Lu. 12:45 parallels Mt. 24:48 and warrants no separate attention. Finally, this verb stands apart only in Lu. 1:21, merely describing Zechariah's delay in the temple. Regardless, at very least, this demonstrates beyond all quibble that it has no *innate* sense of millennia of postponement.

My point is by no means facetious. The *essential* implication of the "signs of the times" philosophy is that our Lord's specific *intent* in his Olivet Discourse was the tortuous passage of some 2,000 years between his First and Second Comings. For example: "Anchored in the historical times of Daniel/John, the prophecies unroll... in a **continuous** sequence of events down through the centuries until the... eternal kingdom."<sup>40</sup>

Holy Writ teaches no such nonsense! The author's mindful, inspired choice of this highly infrequent verb *chronizein* in Heb. 10:37 means one thing and one alone, even though it appears in Hab. 2:3, Septuagint, which he "quoted". In reapplying it Messianically, *he was interpreting Jesus' purpose*. The delay was meant to be almost over in the author's very own day. He expected mere **decades**, not **centuries** or **millennia**, of stalled hopes. It is almost certain, likewise, that John of Patmos had Jesus' nuance of *chronos* in mind in Rev. 10:6. At very least, the noun definitely denotes *delay*.<sup>41</sup> In other words, the prophet John most certainly expected his own generation to live on to observe all of his imminent, eschatological predictions fulfilled.<sup>42</sup>

That is, in terms of primary and even secondary *purpose*, not one single word in Jesus' entire Olivet Discourse demands any fulfillment beyond the **first** Christian century. Why, then, today, almost 2,000 tortuous years later, has he still not returned? For the disciples, little more came to pass than the Fall of Jerusalem and the converts' hasty flight into the mountains. Certainly, despite all of its trauma, this was scarcely the Great Tribulation which Jesus anticipated! For the Hebrews, the "very little while" stretched on and on until death claimed them all. Likewise, John soon succumbed, just like some 60 generations that followed him.

In a word, Jesus did not return precisely as he repeatedly promised. So the NT data should be scoured afresh to address this serious problem. In preparation, one extremely significant factor may point the way.

### ***John of Patmos' Profound Debt to Jesus' Olivet Discourse***

It has long been realised that in his seal septet, Rev. 6; 8:1, the prophet John is indebted to Jesus' Olivet Discourse.<sup>43</sup> Indeed, sometimes this single fact is regarded as quite crucial to unravelling his entire daunting book.<sup>44</sup> In strict literary sequence, here are the parallels between this septet and the synoptic gospels:

<b>Mt. 24</b>	<b>Mk. 13</b>	<b>Lu. 21(17)</b>	<b>Rev. 6</b>
Antichrist, 5 warfare, 6, 7a famines, 7b earthquakes, 7b — [lacking] —	Antichrist, 6 warfare, 7, 8a earthquakes, 8b famines, 8b — [lacking] —	Antichrist, 8 warfare, 9f. earthquakes, 11a famines, 11a pestilences, 11a heavenly signs, 11b persecution, 12-19	conquest, 1f. warfare, 3f.
persecution, 9f. false prophets, 11 apostasy, 12f. gospel, 14 fall of Jerusalem, 15 time of trial, 16-22 last-day deceit, 23-28 heavenly signs, 29 mourning, 30 — [lacking] —	persecution, 9, 11-13	— [lacking] — fall of Jerusalem, 20 time of trial, 21-24 — [lacking] — signs, 25f. — [lacking] — terror, 25f. Parousia, 27 reprieve, (17:26-36)	persecution, 9-11
Parousia, 30f. reprieve, 36-51	gospel, 10 fall of Jerusalem, 14a time of trial, 14b-20 last-day deceit, 21-23 heavenly signs, 24f. — [lacking] — — [lacking] — Parousia, 26f. reprieve, 32-37	— [lacking] — fall of Jerusalem, 20 time of trial, 21-24 — [lacking] — signs, 25f. — [lacking] — terror, 25f. Parousia, 27 reprieve, (17:26-36)	— [lacking] — — [obsolete] — — [lacking] — signs, 12-14 — [lacking] — terror, 15-17 Parousia, 17

### **The Seal Septet and its Gospel Parallels**

Table 1

Manifestly, John's greatest debt is to Luke. For one thing, only seven of John's eight items correspond to Matthew's fifteen and Mark's twelve, if the first is considered. Compare eight of Luke's thirteen. Even then, two of the signs detailed in Lu. 21:11 anticipate those listed in 25f., the heavenly convulsions and the earthquakes, which better equate with the latter's earthly upheavals than their fellows. And the time of trial is an extension of persecution, with immediate reference to the Fall of Jerusalem, which was then mere history.

For another, it is especially significant that Luke *alone* lists pestilence and terror. The mourning of Mt. 24:30 echoes nowhere in Rev. 6:15-17. The latter deals much more with sheer terror than mere mourning. And

terror is definitely the very substance of Lu. 21:25f. *alone* in Christ's Discourse. Equally, Luke *alone* omits the gospel and deception. In other words, *John follows Luke's sequence meticulously*, apart from those earthquakes. Even then, this may be in "deference" to the massive earthquake which he forecasts in Rev. 6:14.

This is scarcely all mere coincidence! Therefore, to inspect each seal in light of the Olivet Discourse is a superb opportunity to determine whether any modifications have revised Jesus' greatest forecast since his own day. And that investigation bears profoundly and decisively upon the very substance of NT prophecy!

### Antichrist

Is the initial horseman Christ and/or his gospel, as many commentators and exegetes assert, along with Seventh-day Adventist apologists,<sup>45</sup> or Antichrist, the precise foil, with equal professional support? The case for the former identity rests largely on the imagery of 19:1121 and the *victor* motif of 5:5. Yet the above **Table 1** virtually demands the latter identity.<sup>46</sup> To replace *conquest* with *gospel* would manifestly ruin their mindful pattern, especially when Luke's record, John's very closest model, never mentions the gospel of salvation.

But when does Antichrist "ride" forth? The key is the persecution to which the verb *conquer* points in 13. The 42 months of affliction, 5, are a literal time period terminated by the Parousia.<sup>47</sup> They also equate with the Great Tribulation, 7:14, from which the saints enter heaven.<sup>48</sup> My stress arises from the decisive fact that the expression *Great Tribulation* is articular here in the Greek. Granted, the identical expression has no article in Mt. 24:21. Yet there is simply no mistaking this affliction eclipsing all before or since! Jesus and John had Daniel's forecast in Dan. 12:1 in specific focus, especially in Theodotion's translation. Therefore, loosing the first seal – hence launching the entire seal septet – marks the onset of the Great Tribulation, just before Jesus' Return. It does not launch some millennia-bridging epoch, as Seventh-day Adventists always insist.

In principle, this prediction only diverges from the Olivet Discourse in that its "Not yet" caution has lapsed. Especially noteworthy, too, is that *John reapplies Jesus' original forecast to his own day*, when his Parousia is imminent.<sup>49</sup> The Fall of Jerusalem is now only a painful memory some 25 years old. The Great Tribulation has been divorced from the Christians' flight. It is a prophetic detail, therefore, as certain of fulfilment as the Parousia, with a *relative*, not *absolute*, time frame. This is a cardinal clue to the nature of NT prophecy!

### Warfare

Seventh-day Adventism's prime apologist for its seal theology views John's second seal in terms of "persecution, the loss of spiritual peace, and division over the gospel."<sup>50</sup> Elsewhere John's Greek verb σφάζειν (*sphazein*) behind *slay*, 6:4, appears to be applied to no more than Jesus' death<sup>51</sup> or Christian martyrdom.<sup>52</sup> Yet 18:24 lays the blame squarely upon Babylon for "*all* who have been killed (*sphazein*) on the earth." The greatest obstacle to Seventh-day Adventism's stance, however, is that this cavalier forces men to slay each other. At very least, this quite precludes persecution, for genuine converts do not slaughter their enemies in kind! Likewise, even if the above **Table 1** did not force us to view Lu. 21:9f. as the source of John's second seal, the reciprocal pronoun *each other* leaves us no room whatever to appeal to Mt. 10:3236. This seal unleashes nothing but far-flung warfare – "(n)ation... against nation, and kingdom against kingdom", Lu. 21:10.

However, since this occurs in the "Not yet" portion of Jesus' Olivet Discourse, does John *reinterpret* him? Mildly at most. The warfare which Jesus forecast would rage till the End, as earth's upheavals give way to the eschatological signs, 10f., of 25f. So John's second seal adds very little to our concept of NT prophecy.

### Famine

The **Table 1** parallels confirm that, just like the events of the second seal, those of the third are perfectly literal. And famine is most certainly to be expected in the wake of warfare! In general terms, then, identical conclusions apply to John's third seal as to his second. We may move on, therefore, with no further delay.

### Pestilence

John's fourth seal stresses that the scourges Jesus foretold will afflict the earth in various forms until he returns. So it is no more helpful in deducing the essence of NT prophecy than the prior two. The fraction *one quarter* warrants a brief comment, however. This limit is in general accord with Luke's less specific "in various places", 21:11. Because these scourges inflict death, Rev. 6:8 – a detail, interestingly, which Jesus restricts to persecution, Mt. 24:9 – the human race would be virtually destroyed were they allowed free rein.

### Persecution

Seventh-day Adventism's typical apologists identify the Christians of John's fifth seal as the martyrs of the Middle Ages.<sup>53</sup> In contrast, there is a strong case for equating this persecution with the 42 months, especially in terms of the noun *testimony*.<sup>54</sup> If so, it does not occupy 1,260 literal years during the Dark Ages, but a mere 3½ short years in the very shadow of the Parousia.<sup>55</sup> The fact that Jesus' sixth-seal Advent follows hard on the heels of this fifth-seal massacre strengthens assurance, especially when 6:10 records the only

Christian prayer in the entire book. This launches the entire trumpet septet,<sup>56</sup> where God increasingly constrains the wicked to repent through crescent judgments culminating in the Parousia of the seventh bowl.<sup>57</sup>

The fact that judgment first occurs at the fifth seal confirms that *the seal septet reinterprets the Olivet Discourse literally*. It follows that John's first six seals span Antichrist's hour of power, then his nemesis when Christ returns, although a survey of his climactic sixth seal awaits our early attention. First, however, does his fifth seal clarify our understanding of NT prophecy? Martyrdom is manifestly implicit in Jesus' words: "If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive", Mt. 24:22. So, except for the broader implications of judgment, this seal confirms but does not expand the first seal's striking contribution to this study.

### Eschatological Signs

Mt. 24:29 lists the major end-time signs in as those in the heavens, although Lu. 21:25f. includes physical upheavals upon earth. The extremely close parallel in the initial half of John's sixth seal cannot be missed:

<b>Mt. 24:29/Lu. 21:25f.</b>	<b>Rev. 6:12-24</b>
sun darkened	great earthquake
moon darkened	sun blackened
stars fall	moon like blood
heavenly bodies shaken	stars fall
earthly upheavals	sky disappears
	great earthquake

Table 2

Granted, Luke does not refer to earthquakes explicitly here. Yet, if their mention in 11 anticipates the earthly upheavals of 25f., as his reference to the ethereal signs in the former looks forward to the latter, the parallel between Luke's record of the Discourse and the first six seals is even closer than first appears in **Table 1**. Here, therefore, are further prophetic details which, like the Great Tribulation, John reapplies to his own day, preserving their precise original order as well. This cluster is as certain of fulfilment as the Parousia, with a *relative* not *absolute* time frame, like the latter. This is doubly a major clue to the substance of NT prophecy.

### The Return of Christ

In his Olivet Discourse, Jesus' primary parousial concern is gathering his faithful followers.<sup>58</sup> The nemesis of the wicked may be in view in the mourning of Mt. 24:30 and in the terror of Lu. 21:25f. However, at very best this is merely implicit. The coin is completely reversed in the second part of John's sixth seal, with the wicked in sharpest focus, Rev. 6:15-17. Indeed, so fearful is the day that the nervous question is, "who can stand?", 17. The progress obtains even though this passage parallels Lu. 21:25f. but not Mt. 24:30;<sup>59</sup> **Table 2**.

Is this a reinterpretation of the Olivet Discourse bearing upon the nature of NT prophecy? Or is it a feature peculiar to John? Fortunately, we do not need to search too far afield for his own transparent answer. It is the Great Tribulation from which the vast multitude, Rev. 7:9, enters heaven to serve God in his temple, 14f. Because this is a short, sharp period of persecution terminated by Christ's Return,<sup>60</sup> the saints of all ages cannot be in view. Yet the blessings of 16f., anticipating 21:3f., must be universal. Then what is John about?

John's primary purpose is pastoral.<sup>61</sup> His sole concern is for his contemporaries,<sup>62</sup> saint and sinner alike. But the former, in dire peril from the latter, is his principal target.<sup>63</sup> Believers are therefore singled out for his special attention, above all for encouragement. A splendid example is the first resurrection, 20:4-6, which is apparently confined entirely to last-day Christian martyrs.<sup>64</sup> Regardless, there is no reason to doubt Christ's own assurance that all of the righteous will rise in the resurrection of life, Jn. 5:28f. Furthermore, the forceful implication of Rev. 20:5f. is that all who miss out on this initial resurrection will suffer the second death.

That is, here and in 7:9-17, at least, John mindfully restricts his sights in order to focus his flock's attention. They are "singled out for particular mention because of the situation of the Church for which John writes."<sup>65</sup> *They* must face the dreadful ordeal looming large upon their horizon, so *they* must be steeled against it. *They* must be assured that the reward for fidelity here is *theirs*. "John is quite capable of concentrating on one thing at a time so that he omits quite important considerations which are not immediately relevant."<sup>66</sup>

Regardless, this is not characteristic of NT prophecy *per se*. The Parousia will occur. But its timing is *relative* not *absolute*. Jesus applied it to his day. When it lapsed, though, John calmly *reapplied* it to his own.

### The Seventh Seal

The seventh seal's importance cannot be overstated. As it is loosed, the crucial scroll in God's hand, 5:1, can at long last be opened, with profound implications for interpreting John's book.<sup>67</sup> Regardless, it barely concerns its own septet, which climaxes in the Parousia at the *sixth* seal. However, the question remains, How should we classify those two clusters of striking events which, at first sight, appear to intervene in 7?

Simply stated, these are interludes which each slice clean through this septet, bearing little temporal relationship either with it or with each other.<sup>68</sup> For example, the 144,000 are sealed, 7:1-8, prior to the Parousia, 6:12-17. And the Great Multitude does not enter heaven, 7:9-17, prior to the Great Tribulation. Moreover, it is the Lamb who opens each seal. Yet in the Greek, this subject is explicit as a noun in 6:1 alone. Thereafter it is *supplied* by the translators for its relevant verb<sup>69</sup> – even in 8:1! It would certainly stretch credibility downright thin to suggest that the latter's verb must look back two whole chapters for its own subject, especially with the noun *God* so very proximate in 7:17 – unless 7 *in toto* disrupts the seal septet in literary terms, at least.

### ***Unfulfilled Expectations Again***

I have been by no means exhaustive in this important subject of the nature of prophecy. However, most importantly, no NT author, prophet or otherwise, repeats the Olivet Discourse nearly as extensively as John. And no one else applies it nearly so consistently. The Book of Revelation offers the extra advantage of the greatest possible distance in time from Christ's words. Certainly, a prophetic voice this side of the climactic Fall of Jerusalem is crucial to detect any change which may have occurred. Then what change, if any, has taken place? In a word, except for the Fall of Jerusalem itself, which by now was long past, *John reapplies our Lord's complete sequence of rapid-fire, end-time events literally, in precise order, to his contemporaries.*

***These, then, are the sole, permanent features of NT prophecy*** of which we can speak with assurance. Even then, this is not to expect John's every *fine* detail of warfare, famine or pestilence – transferred from Jesus' ***not yet*** list, please note – within his trumpet or bowl septet to have relevance beyond his own day.<sup>70</sup>

Yet, even those core details no more occurred for John than for Jesus. So, while they must eventuate, *we will never know when beforehand.* Only “all these things”, Mt. 24:33, will signal the imminence of Christ's Parousia. The events which he designated “birth pangs” have been manifest to every generation since his, to which he certainly applied them. Therefore, *they do not bespeak imminence to anyone.* The passing of a great deal of time has simply revealed that the “labour” of God's Kingdom can be extremely protracted.

The crucial question, then, is this: Have these forecasts failed? For some interpreters, this is the obvious solution to this enigma of non-fulfilling prophecies.<sup>71</sup> If not, precisely what mechanism is in operation here?

One modern suggestion is the apotelesmatic principle. *The Oxford English Dictionary* credits the adjective to the Greek noun ἀποτέλεσμα (*apotelesma*). This does not grace the NT, in fact. But it is represented by its cognate verb ἀποτελεῖν (*apotelein*), with the sense *fruition by process*, as in “full-grown”, James 1:15.

G. M. Price defines the precept thus: “[A] partial or preliminary fulfillment may take place in one age, then long afterward a much more complete fulfillment.”<sup>72</sup> D. Ford likewise maintains that prophecy is “apotelesmatic in nature, repeatedly fulfilling itself until the final flowering of its consummative accomplishment.”<sup>73</sup> In fact this is inadequate on at least two highly significant counts. First, *process* of fulfilment transparently implies *purpose*. This confronts the stubborn fact that forecasts like Christ's great Olivet Discourse ***could*** have been fulfilled *in toto* to their pristine recipients. Secondly, some events can have no partial fulfilment. Most obvious is Jesus' Return. However, the Great Tribulation is equally unique as exceeding all before or since.

Of course, none of this denies that, God being God and Satan being Satan, throughout history the faithful will often face such crises as those which engendered Christ's Olivet Discourse and the Book of Revelation. But these are far more *pseudo-fulfillments* than *partial* fulfilments. A key opens a door if it fits *every* contour of the lock. So ***fulfilment applies to events precisely matching the full inventory.*** God is honoured by rigorous *exegesis*, not the facile *surmise* marring much prophetic opinion. May we ***never*** encourage it!

Conditionality is a far more cogent option as a regulating principle. For instance, Jesus may not have returned to the first Christians when they did not finish his Gospel Commission, Mt. 24:14. Certainly, the Revelation's dire threats were conditional for saints and sinners alike. So the doom they forecast would be quite capricious if the former repented and the trauma threatening the latter failed to eventuate.<sup>74</sup> The fact that the Great Tribulation did not befall John's flock as he had warned – the threat subsided when Emperor Domitian died<sup>75</sup> – is therefore a thoroughly tenable reason why Jesus did not then return precisely as promised.

At very least, the NT itself does provide one answer to this perplexing enigma of the delay: “The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, ***not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance***”, 2 Pet. 3:9. Perhaps that is all we really need to know.

### ***The Essence of NT Prophecy***

In essence, therefore, NT prophecy is no history in advance, punctuated by “prophetic waymarks”. It is ***salvific***, as manifest in 2 Pet. 3:9 and John's entire forecast. God's plea has ever been, “I take ***no*** pleasure in the death of ***anyone***... Repent and live!”, Eze. 18:32.<sup>76</sup> Hence his crucial conditionality principle, Jer. 18:12.

Actually, precisely the same can be said about Jesus' Olivet Discourse. It germinated in his rejection by his people, thereby calling divine judgment down upon their proud city, Lu. 21:22. And it is overshadowed

by his repeated warnings, Be ready and watch. Indeed, this is all that can be said regarding Christ's Return. There will be a small cluster of portents. But, as all these warnings reveal, it will then be *far* too late.

The tragedy, then, is that, at best, Seventh-day Adventism is making rather an exegetical fool of itself with its naïve, historicist interpretation of Christ's surpassing, Olivet Discourse. Even his select core of disciples privileged to audit him were *preterists*, beyond all quibble! So was John of Patmos, who offers it no support whatever, even in his seal septet. The transparently farcical "signs of the times" which it parades can scarcely convince the cautious to accept the momentous, NT doctrine of Jesus' Return, let alone prepare for it. But at worst, his follower's only shield against the fearful, satanic deceptions about which he warns, Mt. 24:4f.; 23:28, is a precise grasp of significant Bible truth, practised as faithfully as diligently, Eph. 6:10-18.<sup>77</sup>

These two *fundamentally* diverse ideologies of prophetic interpretation contrast very sharply, as follows:

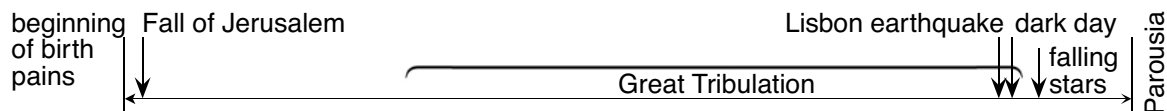


Figure 1: a Historicism Perspective on NT Prophecy

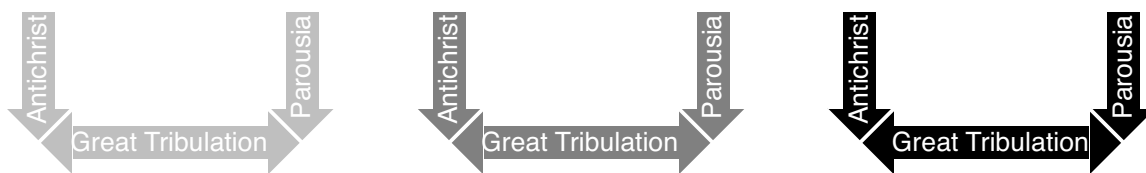


Figure 2: a Conditionalist Perspective on NT Prophecy

Some readers may find it more helpful to visualise **Figure 2** in terms of a locked suitcase carried everywhere during some long, tortuous, uncertain journey and opened, to expose its contents, only at its close. End-time's minute core of prime events *pend* often, under similar circumstances, yet finally *occur* just once.

<sup>1</sup> Mt. 24f.; Mk. 13; Lu. 21:5-36. Cf. 17:20-37.

<sup>2</sup> The term is borrowed from Mt. 16:3.

<sup>3</sup> E.g., see my "Seventh-day Adventism's Upstart Doctrine of Determinism in the Books of Daniel and Revelation – a Selective Appraisal", November, 2000, 2.

<sup>4</sup> E.g., *Daniel 8:14, the Day of Atonement, and the Investigative Judgment* (Casselberry: Euangelion Press, 1980), 275f., A-142-144.

<sup>5</sup> E.g., "Issues in Revelation: DARCOM Report", *DARCOM* 6, 179; G. F. Hasel, "The 'Little Horn,' the Heavenly Sanctuary, and the Time of the End: a Study of Daniel 8:9-14", *DARCOM* 2, 441-443; B. S. Neall, "Sealed Saints and the Tribulation", *DARCOM* 6, 252f.; J. Paulien, "The Seven Seals", *DARCOM* 6, 225, 243. For full bibliographical details of the DARCOM apologia, see the "inside cover" of this article.

<sup>6</sup> I have addressed this issue, quite crucial to her Church's credentials, comprehensively yet briefly in my "Seventh-day Adventism's Dogma of an Investigative Judgment through Ellen White's Eyes", July, 2002, *passim*.

<sup>7</sup> E.g., the earth beast's fatal wound, Rev. 13:3, 12, 14. Seventh-day Adventists view it as the Papacy surviving the Pope's capture by Napoleonic troops in 1798. Yet with equal fervour the Jehovah's Witnesses see it as the United Nations succeeding the League of Nations, destroyed by World War 1, *Revelation; its Grand Climax at Hand!* (Brooklyn: Watchtower, 1988), 190f.

<sup>8</sup> Ellen G. White, DA 628. Re such abbreviations, see n. 1 of my Appendix B, *infra*.

<sup>9</sup> "Matthew", *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* 8, edd. F. E. Gaebelin *et al.* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 491. However, her historicism is not typical. Most evangelicals are (preterist)futurists.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 491f.

<sup>11</sup> *Infra*, 5.

<sup>12</sup> Carson, *art. cit.*, 498.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. 4:31; 13:21, and more generally, Isa. 13:8; 21:3; Jer. 22:23; 49:22, 24; 50:43.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. 26:17; Jer. 30:6; Mic. 4:9f.

<sup>15</sup> *Art. cit.*, 498, though I do not imply that Carson is a *conditional* preterist like me.

<sup>16</sup> See my Appendix A. In another direction, volcanoes are conspicuously absent from Jesus' list of allegedly waymark phenomena. Yet they do far more damage than earthquakes! E.g., the first Christian millennium was bisected by a decade or more of catastrophic wintry conditions when an ancestor of Sumatra's Mount Krakatoa blew apart, quickly encircling our planet in a thick shroud of impenetrable dust.

<sup>17</sup> I use this version here and below when the NIV does not translate the adverb.

<sup>18</sup> *Infra*, 4f.

<sup>19</sup> "Looking for the Waymarks", *RECORD*, July 22, 1989, 4.

<sup>20</sup> E.g., see either my "Investigative Judgment", 17, or my "Upstart Doctrine", 8.

<sup>21</sup> 11:31; 12:11.

<sup>22</sup> E.g., briefly, see my "Investigative Judgment", 27.

<sup>23</sup> E.g., see my "Not One Drop of Blood in the Time of Trouble? Ellen White's Catastrophic Time Bomb Awaiting her Hapless Devotees", December, 2000, 5-7. Cf. my "Upstart Doctrine", n. 44.

<sup>24</sup> Note "[a]t the time of the end", 11:40, and "[a]t that time", 12:1.

<sup>25</sup> In a remarkably candid trio of articles, M. E. Sprenkel returns to the original sources to verify that "a large number of Seventh-day Adventists hold views about the Dark Day that cannot be substantiated from the 1780 historical record", "The Dark Day plus 200 years", *Adventist Review*, May 22, 1980, 5. Sprenkel's third article, "1780 accounts of the Dark Day", *ibid.*, June 5, 1980, 11-14, confirms my geographical claims above. The series is a superb study on the psychology of embracing favourable claims uncritically, and even sifting the data in the interests of prior opinion. This came starkly to my personal attention recently, at the end of a long period of dialogue with a retired Seventh-day Adventist leader of exemplary integrity over the cogency of the DARCOM apologia. He had promised me at the outset that he was "prepared to listen to opinions to the contrary. Naturally I would need some very strong reasons why I should think otherwise." After a parade of "very strong reasons" had been parried in standard sectarian style, I appealed to the Sprenkel articles to prove that even respected Seventh-day Adventist experts were querying certain traditions. He appealed in turn to some of the very "historical" evidence completely debunked by Sprenkel! If Seventh-day Adventists will take *no* notice even of mild, expert, *internal* reform, they will give no credence to *external* critics!

<sup>26</sup> B. Hobson, "Sign or Signs?", *RECORD*, May 13, 1989, 5. This circulates in Australasia.

<sup>27</sup> J. Coffin, "In Such an Hour...", *ibid.*, June 10, 1989, 2. He was Editor at the time. <sup>28</sup> Editorial note, "Letters" section, 3, *ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> "In Such an Hour...", *ibid.*, 2.

<sup>30</sup> See n. 19. Scragg is amongst the Seventh-day Adventist executives directly responsible for my sharing my concerns in cyberspace after being arrogantly ignored in persistent, personal correspondence. The blame should also be shared by Seventh-day Adventist editors who, while at times refusing to air even the most tactful protest, dutifully print almost any trash penned by their superiors! A striking case is Dr. G. Pfandl's

"Meteor Showers and the Year 1833", *ibid.*, October 24, 1998, 8. He labelled the Leonid Storm of November 13, 1833, as the "greatest meteor shower in modern history". One witness "estimated that no less than 240,000 meteors were visible at any one time". Yet even *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Students' Source Book*, from which he draws some of his unaccredited data, especially ## 730, 737, includes evidence, as in ## 743, 744, that the Leonid Storm of 1866 over Beirut and England was equally intense. Secondly and more importantly, Pfandl's credibility does not survive his naïve reiteration of the purported eyewitness estimate of at least 240,000 simultaneous meteors during the 1833 Leonid Storm. For one thing, even the best bare human eye cannot distinguish more than twenty individual events per second, or 72,000 per hour. For another, by its very nature each Shower consists in meteors radiating from a single point in the sky, the constellation Leo. These 240,000 would crowd the horizon, on average, at almost 700 per degree of latitude, where there is space for maybe five at most to be distinguished! Alternatively, assuming an average transit time to the horizon for one meteor of one second, 240,000 meteors per second is equivalent to an utterly incredible 864 million per hour! And yes, the Editor responsible dutifully ignored every one of my protests!

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Eze. 32:7; Joel 2:10, 31; 3:15.

<sup>32</sup> Carson readily concurs in principle, *art. cit.*, 507.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Lu. 1:48.

<sup>35</sup> Mt. 11:16; 12:41, 42; 23:36; Mk. 8:12; Lu. 11:30, 31, 32, 50, 51; 17:25. Cf. Mt. 12:45; Mk. 8:38; Lu. 11:29.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Jude 18.

<sup>37</sup> Mt. 24:5, 23, 24. Cf. 1 Jn. 2:22; 4:3; 2 Jn. 7.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. 10:11.

<sup>39</sup> 2 Tim. 3:15 is often paraded as a forecast exposing our wicked generation. However, the entire epistle is addressed to Timothy personally, and this section is no different. E.g., both directives bounding it – "mark this", 1, and "Have nothing to do with them", 5 – are singular in their Greek verbs. Moreover, the *however* of 10 attests that it had direct relevance to Timothy.

<sup>40</sup> W. R. Leshner & F. B. Holbrook, "Daniel and Revelation Committee: Final Report", *DARCOM 7*, 453. Cf. Paulien, *art. cit.*, 225, 233.

<sup>41</sup> It will suffice to note the conjunction linking the affirmation "'There will be no more delay!'", 10:6, to the temporal expression, "'when the seventh angel blows his trumpet,'" 7, GNB. That conjunction is *ἀλλά* (*alla*), from the adjective *ἄλλος* (*allos*), meaning *another*. So it denotes a close link by way of forceful **contrast**. It is often rendered *but*. However, this often masks the force of the conjunction, which is preserved in *instead*, e.g., in NIV, Mt. 20:26; Acts 7:39; Eph. 5:18; 6:4; 2 Tim. 2:24; 4:3; 1 Pet. 3:4 and *on the contrary*, e.g., in NIV, Ro. 12:20; 1 Cor. 12:22; 2 Cor. 4:2; 1 Thess. 2:4; 2 Thess. 3:8 and *rather*, e.g., in NIV, Ro. 3:31; 11:11; 13:14; 2 Cor. 6:4; Gal. 1:12; 5:13; Tit. 1:8. If Seventh-day Adventism is right, the angel says, in effect: "Prophetic time will end in 1844. *Rather*, when the seventh angel is about to trumpet, God's mystery will finish." In contrast, if I am correct, the angel says, in effect: "There will be no more delay. *Rather*, when the seventh angel trumpets, God's mystery will finish." Need I say anything more? I think not! For a brief analysis of the context, see my "Upstart Doctrine", n. 46, latter half.

<sup>42</sup> E.g., see either my "Investigative Judgment", 20-22, or my "Upstart Doctrine", 8-11.

<sup>43</sup> E.g., G. R. Beasley-Murray, *The Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), 129f.; G. E. Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 98f.

<sup>44</sup> E.g., Ford, *op. cit.*, 36.

<sup>45</sup> E.g., Neall, *art. cit.*, 248; Paulien, *art. cit.*, 205, 225, 227-230, 233f.

<sup>46</sup> In parallel with all three synoptic accounts, in fact.

<sup>47</sup> See nn. 23, 56.

<sup>48</sup> There is no other candidate for the Great Tribulation in John's book since the earth beast's surpassing persecution, 13:11-17, proceeds *together* with that of the sea beast, 14:2, as outlined briefly in my "Blood", 5-7.

<sup>49</sup> See n. 42.

<sup>50</sup> Paulien, *art. cit.*, 230.

<sup>51</sup> 5:6, 9, 12; 13:8. Cf. the parody, 13:3.

<sup>52</sup> 6:9.

<sup>53</sup> E.g., Paulien, *art. cit.*, 235f.; W. H. Shea, "The Mighty Angel and his Message", *DARCOM 6*, 303. They even try to defend Seventh-day Adventism's crucial dogma of a pre-Advent judgment here! E.g., the verb *judge* implies an investigative judgment and *avenge* the End. For Paulien, the white robes evince the former, *art. cit.*, 236, while Shea appeals to the process of making up the count of martyrs, *art. cit.*, *loc. cit.* But several factors speak decisively against this. First, nothing in John's book points to a protracted process. Even if it were, the fact that the martyrs were asked to "wait a little longer", 11, scarcely finds fulfilment in the almost 160 years that have passed since 1844, at time of writing! Indeed, this period seems to have a close thematic link with Satan's *short* time, 12:12. Secondly, there is no cause at all to separate the judging and avenging of 6:10. Even Paulien points us to 19:2 as its **exact** foil, even in the use of **both** key verbs: "The former is a call for judgment... and vengeance... on those who dwell on the earth. The latter proclaims that judgment... and vengeance... have been carried out on Babylon", *art. cit.*, 205. He knows, too, that the judgment here, in context, is executive, not investigative, *ibid.* Thirdly, the white robes are given before the waiting time, 6:11. So I fail to see how this implies an incipient scrutiny. Likewise, the transparent intent of the delay is to finish the count of martyrs. Shea's path to an investigative judgment here completely eludes me.

<sup>54</sup> While it is instructive to explore John's entire μαρτυρία (*martyria*) complex, it will suffice here to note that the martyrs of the beast, 20:4, held fast to the testimony of Jesus, like the martyrs of 6:9. Cf. 17:6.

<sup>55</sup> See n. 23.

<sup>56</sup> See my "Upstart Doctrine", n. 44.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, nn. 45-47.

<sup>58</sup> Mt. 24:30f.; Mk. 13:26f.

<sup>59</sup> *Supra*, 8.

<sup>60</sup> See nn. 23, 56.

<sup>61</sup> John's very conditionality, my "Upstart Doctrine", 8-11, bespeaks his pastoral rôle. By far his most protracted pastoral portion is his "letter" septet, with its reminder of sporadic martyrdom, 2:13, and warnings of imminent traumas both local, 10, and universal, 3:10. His major narrative is ruptured by interludes at points of special need. Their prime intent is to steel his flock with glimpses of glory beyond the brewing trauma, e.g., 14:15. His book is sprinkled with pointed pastoral blessings, e.g., 14:13. Isolated admonitions serve his purpose equally. E.g., his grimmest forecast of persecution is disrupted by the command of 13:9. Cf. Jesus' own dire caveat in the midst of the penultimate bowl judgment, 16:15. Hence his initial beatitude, 1:3, echoed in 22:18f. The saints must respect his complete pastoral message, just as they obey God's edicts, 12:17. John's pastoral ministry also actuates him to pressure his flock's foes to repent, n. 56.

<sup>62</sup> See n. 42.

<sup>63</sup> See n. 60.

<sup>64</sup> Cf. the major, precise persecution details: worship, 13:15; mark, 17. Cf. n. 53.

<sup>65</sup> Beasley-Murray, *op. cit.*, 295.

<sup>66</sup> L. Morris, *The Book of Revelation: an Introduction and Commentary* (Leicester: IVP, 1987<sup>2</sup>), 155.

<sup>67</sup> The burden of the chants in 5 is the worth of the Lamb to take the scroll and open its seals, 9. The opening is demanded with great authority, sought with much anguish, achieved at vast cost, anticipated with immense joy, 2:14, and intimated in the clearest possible terms. No sooner does the Lamb take the scroll than its paramount purpose is implied. The living beings and the elders fall down before him, 8:4. The prime symbols here are harps, golden bowls and incense, with the new song and the saints' prayers, 8:10. The harps and new song point expressly to the glimpses of the victors in glory, beyond temptation and persecution, in 14:15 and 15:2-4. Golden bowls recur only in the bowl septet as vessels of God's wrath. This implies that the saints' prayers, which the bowls first contain, are instrumental in their judgment. Incense recurs mainly in 8:3, like the saints' prayers. Here the graphic imagery, 2:5, drives the point even more firmly home that these prayers truly effect the punishment of the foes of God and his saints! For the angel's striking oblation follows the breaking of the last seal, 8:1, and is its only notable result. Indeed, the very censor that perfumes the prayers, 3f., launches the entire trumpet septet, 5. I.e., although Christ has triumphed on the Cross and gained the saints' salvation, 5:9f., he must loose the seals and open the scroll if they are actually to survive the looming seduction and torment intact in spirit and enter eternal bliss.

<sup>68</sup> See n. 60.

<sup>69</sup> 3, 5, 7, 9, 12.

<sup>70</sup> E.g., for evidence that, above all, Emperor Domitian menaced converts, see my "Blood" 15f.

<sup>71</sup> G. E. Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (London: Lutterworth, 1975), 208f., surveys typical scholars who support such a solution.

<sup>72</sup> *The Greatest of the Prophets: a New Commentary on the Book of Daniel* (Mountain View: PPPA, 1955), 30.

<sup>73</sup> *Crisis!: a Commentary on the Book of Revelation*, 1 (Newcastle: Desmond Ford, 1982), 40.

<sup>74</sup> See my "Upstart Doctrine", 9-11.

<sup>75</sup> See n. 69.

<sup>76</sup> *Inter alia*, cf. 21:23, 27f.; 33:11, 14, 19; 2 Chr. 30:9; Isa. 55:7; Jer. 18:7f., 11; 26:3; Joel 2:12f.

<sup>77</sup> Equally the gist, of course, of the *entire* "Keep watch!" portion of Jesus' Olivet Discourse. Cf. John of Patmos' insistence that his flocks' only safety in the face of Antichrist's looming assault is in closely heeding his entire pastoral/prophetic message, as in 1:3; 22:7.

## APPENDIX A

*Earthquakes – One of Jesus’ “Signs of the Times”?*

There can be no credible denial that Jesus himself included “great earthquakes... in various places”, Lu. 21:11,<sup>1</sup> amongst his enigmatic birth pains, Mt. 24:8.<sup>2</sup> And Christians of various conservative persuasions have long been zealous in parading the dismal statistics of earth’s crustal instability as spectacular fulfillments.<sup>3</sup>

Quite apart from the credibility of the entire theology of Christ’s “signs of the times”,<sup>4</sup> this is sheer naïveté!

First, I will permit others to counter such zealots’ claims that global seismism is increasingly frequent.<sup>5</sup> All that warrants stressing here is that, even in OT times, severe earthquakes were **no** novelty whatever.<sup>6</sup> And, via the U.S. National Geophysical Data Center,<sup>7</sup> a survey of the intervening millennia speaks clearly for itself:

<u>Year</u>	<u>Location</u>	<u>Dead</u>	<u>Year</u>	<u>Location</u>	<u>Dead</u>
365	Crete	50,000	1927	Central China	200,000
856	Iran	200,000	1932	Central China	70,000
893	India; Iran	330,000	1935	Western India (Pakistan)	60,000
1138	Egypt; Syria	330,000	1939	Central Chile	30,000
1201	Northern Egypt	1,100,000	1960	Western Morocco	12,000
1268	Cilicia (Turkey)	60,000	1962	Northwestern Iran	10,000
1290	Northeastern China	100,000	1968	Northeastern Iran	11,588
1556	Central China	830,000	1972	Nicaragua	5,000
1667	Caucasus (Azerbaijan)	80,000	1976	Guatemala	23,000
1693	Sicily	100,000	1976	Northeastern China	240,000
1703	Honshu, Japan	200,000	1978	Eastern Iran	15,000
1730	Hokkaido, Japan	137,000	1980	Northern Algeria	5,000
1731	Beijing, China	100,000	1985 <sup>8</sup>	Central Mexico	7,200
1755	Lisbon, Portugal	60,000	1988	Armenia	25,000
1779	Northern Iran	100,000	1990	Northwestern Iran	40,000
1783	Southern Italy	50,000	1993	Central India	9,743
1868	Ecuador	70,000	1995	Japan	5,502
1908	Sicily	75,000	1999	Northwestern Turkey	17,000
1915	Central Italy	29,970	2001	Western India	25,000
1920	Central China	200,000			

This survey also utterly puts paid to Seventh-day Adventism’s assertion, important if not crucial to its historicist philosophy of prophetic interpretation,<sup>9</sup> that the Lisbon earthquake of 1755 was “the most terrible earthquake that has ever been recorded.”<sup>10</sup> Nor does “one of the strongest in recorded history”<sup>11</sup> boost credibility.

Secondly and decisively, the simple fact of this matter is that global seismism has been a fairly *significant* phenomenon ever since human footprints first shaped earth’s pristine pathways. Its continents float astride huge tectonic plates which roam continuously across its molten interior.<sup>12</sup> Earthquakes cluster mostly along their edges as these plates grind slowly against each other.<sup>13</sup> And this has been occurring with reasonable consistency ever since Creation! It follows that, despite their magnitude and the immense death, terror and havoc they cause world-wide, *earthquakes never have been and never will be divine signs of anything* – with the sole exception that the greatest of all will announce the end-time judgment of the Day of the Lord.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Mt. 24:7; Mk. 13:8.

<sup>2</sup> *Supra*, 2.

<sup>3</sup> E.g., Seventh-day Adventists. Generally, Ellen White holds, PP 108f., that the huge forests buried by Noah’s Flood “have since been changed to coal... and... oil. The coal and oil frequently ignite and burn beneath the surface of the earth. Thus... limestone is burned... The action of the water upon the lime adds fury to the intense heat, and causes earthquakes, volcanoes, and fiery issues... Volcanic eruptions follow; and... the earth itself is convulsed..., great fissures appear, and sometimes cities, villages, and burning mountains are swallowed up. These... manifestations will be more and more frequent and terrible just before... the end of the world, as signs of its speedy destruction.” It is quite an instructive exercise, which cannot detain us, to compare these “inspired” assertions with reliable, scientific explanations of seismism! Specifically, she asserts quite naïvely, GC 304, that, *in precise fulfillment of Jesus’ Olivet Discourse*, the Lisbon earthquake of 1755 was “the most terrible earthquake that has ever been recorded.” Cf. the so-called Jehovah’s Witnesses, whose theology is soundly rejected as typical in this detail in “Are there more earthquakes this century?: Is this a sign that Jesus is to return?” @ [www.bible.ca/pre-earthquakes-history-data](http://www.bible.ca/pre-earthquakes-history-data).

<sup>4</sup> The burden of my entire, main essay.

<sup>5</sup> E.g., [neic.usgs.gov/neis/eqlists/eqstats](http://neic.usgs.gov/neis/eqlists/eqstats); [neic.usgs.gov/neis/eqlists/graphs](http://neic.usgs.gov/neis/eqlists/graphs). Cf. the final detail of my n. 3.

<sup>6</sup> E.g., Amos 1:1; Zech. 14:5; Mt. 27:51-54; 28:2; Acts 16:26 obviously record divinely ordained earthquakes. Yet no special vocabulary is required.

<sup>7</sup> Public record information adapted from *World Book*, Mac OS X edition, 2001. Cf. similar data @ [www.disasterrelief.org/Library/WorldDis/wde1\\_txt](http://www.disasterrelief.org/Library/WorldDis/wde1_txt); [www.infoplease.com/ipa/A0001439](http://www.infoplease.com/ipa/A0001439); [www.swishweb.com/Disasters/Earthquakes/disaster01e](http://www.swishweb.com/Disasters/Earthquakes/disaster01e).

<sup>8</sup> N.b., two earthquakes were involved.

<sup>9</sup> *Supra*, 4.

<sup>10</sup> See my n. 3. All stress is supplied here and in the following quotation.

<sup>11</sup> R. P. Lehmann, “The Second Coming of Jesus”, *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, ed. R. Dederan (Hagerstown: R&H, 2000), 906a.

<sup>12</sup> Those unfamiliar with this absorbing subject will find a comprehensive survey @ [pubs.usgs.gov/gip/earthq1](http://pubs.usgs.gov/gip/earthq1) and concise information @ both [www.thetech.org/hyper/quakes/plates](http://www.thetech.org/hyper/quakes/plates) and [www.germantown.k12.il.us/html/earthquakes](http://www.germantown.k12.il.us/html/earthquakes). Also helpful is the rather excellent animation @ [www.odsn.de/odsn/services/paleomap/animation](http://www.odsn.de/odsn/services/paleomap/animation). Most sites have further fruitful links.

<sup>13</sup> E.g., access the graphic of seismic distribution @ [neic.usgs.gov/neis/eqlists/MAG7/mag7](http://neic.usgs.gov/neis/eqlists/MAG7/mag7). <sup>14</sup> E.g., Heb. 12:26; Rev. 6:12; 16:18. Cf. Eze. 38:19.

## APPENDIX B

### *Jesus' Olivet Discourse Tests Ellen White's Prophetic Credentials*

It is no surprise that Ellen White fully endorses Seventh-day Adventism's historicist interpretation of Jesus' Olivet Discourse.<sup>1</sup> However, her final stance diverges strikingly from her earlier position,<sup>2</sup> both the result, she insists, of divine inspiration. This is very interesting *per se* in evaluating her purported prophetic credentials. But it takes on far more significance in light of her adamant appeals to the manifest guidance of the Holy Spirit during the Millerite trauma of herself and her fellow pioneers of the Seventh-day Adventist movement.

#### The Holy Spirit's Specific, Endorsing Guidance throughout the Millerite Movement

Ellen White appeals to her angel guide in sternly warning careless hands away from the sectarian theology<sup>3</sup> that was gleaned and preached as William Miller alerted his nation that Jesus' Return was imminent:

I was shown three steps—the first, second, and third angels' messages. Said my accompanying angel, "Woe to him who shall move a block or stir a pin of these messages. The true understanding of these messages is of vital importance. The destiny of souls hangs upon the manner in which they are received." I was again brought down through these messages, and saw how dearly the people of God had purchased their experience. It had been obtained through much suffering and severe conflict. God had led them along step by step, until He had placed them upon a solid, immovable platform. I saw individuals approach the platform and examine the foundation. Some with rejoicing immediately stepped upon it. Others commenced to find fault with the foundation. They wished improvements made, and then the platform would be more perfect... Some stepped off the platform to examine it and declared it to be laid wrong. But I saw that nearly all stood firm upon the platform and exhorted those who had stepped off to cease their complaints; for God was the Master Builder, and they were fighting against Him. They recounted the wonderful work of God, which had led them to the firm platform, and in union raised their eyes to heaven and with a loud voice glorified God. This affected some of those who had complained and left the platform, and they with humble look again stepped upon it.<sup>4</sup>

In fact, she and her fellows were called out of their former Churches and assembled together during this very process of discovery.<sup>5</sup> No wonder, then, which power it really is directing his assaults upon this truth:

... Satan is at work to undermine the faith of the people of God at this time... The prophecies of Daniel and the Revelation are misinterpreted... [T]he truth has been set forth at the appointed time by the very men whom God was leading to do this special work. These men followed on step by step in the very fulfillment of prophecy, and those who have not had a personal experience in this work, [*sic*] are to take the Word of God and believe on "their word" who have been led by the Lord in the proclamation of the first, second, and third angels' messages...

... [V]ery erroneous work... will continue to be done by those who seek to find new light in the prophecies, and who begin by turning away from the light that God has already given. The messages of Revelation 14 are those by which the world is to be tested... [T]he Lord does not lay upon those who have not had an experience in His work the burden of making a new exposition of those prophecies which He has, by His Holy Spirit, moved upon His chosen servants to explain.<sup>6</sup>

... For the past fifty years every phase of heresy has been brought to bear upon us, to becloud our minds regarding... the message of... the angels of the fourteenth chapter of Revelation. Messages of every order and kind have been urged upon Seventh-day Adventists, to take the place of the truth which, point by point, has been sought out by prayerful study, and testified to by the miracle-working power of the Lord. But the waymarks which have made us what we are, [*sic*] are to be preserved, and they will be preserved, as God has signified through His Word and the testimony of His Spirit. He calls upon us to hold firmly, with the grip of faith, to the fundamental principles that are based upon unquestionable authority.<sup>7</sup>

Therefore, Seventh-day Adventists should certainly refuse to heed the words of anyone whose message contradicts the special points of our faith. They gather together a mass of Scripture, and pile it as proof around their asserted theories... And while the Scriptures are God's word, and are to be respected, the application of them, if such application moves one pillar from the foundation that God has sustained these fifty years, is a great mistake. He who makes such an application knows not the wonderful demonstration of the Holy Spirit that gave power and force to the past messages...<sup>8</sup>

So confident of her experience is Ellen White, in fact, that she makes this most astounding comparison:

Not a peg or pin is to be removed. No human authority has any more right to change the location of these messages than to substitute the New Testament for the Old Testament. The Old Testament is the gospel in figures and symbols. The New Testament is the substance. One is as essential as the other... The first and second messages were given in 1843 and 1844, and we are now under the proclamation of the third; but all three messages are still to be proclaimed...<sup>9</sup>

And that is just a step beyond her bold citation then application of 1 Jn. 1:13 to her own pioneer experience:

I testify the things which I have seen, the things which I have heard, the things which my hands have handled of the Word of life. And this testimony I know to be of the Father and the Son. We have seen and do testify that the power of the Holy Ghost has accompanied the presentation of the truth,... giving the messages in their order. To deny this work would be to deny the Holy Ghost, and would place us in that company who have departed from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits.<sup>10</sup>

## Millerite Interpretation of Jesus' Olivet Discourse

The beliefs of Seventh-day Adventist pioneers do not always echo those of William Miller himself.<sup>11</sup> What counts here, though, is Ellen White's grasp of the relevant portion of Jesus' Olivet Discourse, his parable of the ten virgins, Mt. 25:1-13. The fact that *she applies it literally to their experience* majors in these quotations:

The parable of the ten virgins of Matthew 25... illustrates the experience of the Adventist people... In this parable their experience is illustrated by the incidents of an Eastern marriage...

The coming of Christ, as announced by the first angel's message [Rev. 14:6f.], was understood to be represented by the coming of the bridegroom. The widespread reformation under the proclamation of His soon coming, [*sic*] answered to the going forth of the virgins...

... By the tarrying of the bridegroom is represented the passing of the time when the Lord was expected, the disappointment, and the seeming delay. In this time of uncertainty, the interest of the superficial and halfhearted soon began to waver, and their efforts to relax; but those whose faith was based on a personal knowledge of the Bible had a rock beneath their feet, which the waves of disappointment could not wash away. "They all slumbered and slept;" one class in unconcern and abandonment of their faith, the other class patiently waiting till clearer light should be given. Yet in the night of trial the latter seemed to lose, to some extent, their zeal and devotion. The halfhearted and superficial could no longer lean upon the faith of their brethren. Each must stand or fall for himself...

... In the summer of 1844, midway between the time when it had been first thought that the 2300 days would end, and the autumn of the same year, to which it was afterward found that they extended, the message was proclaimed in the very words of Scripture: "Behold, the Bridegroom cometh!"...

In the parable of Matthew 25 the time of waiting and slumber is followed by the coming of the bridegroom... [T]he "midnight cry" was heralded by thousands of believers.

Like a tidal wave the movement swept... [f]rom city to city, from village to village, and into remote country places it went, until the waiting people of God were fully aroused... It bore the characteristics that mark the work of God in every age...

Of all the great religious movements since the days of the apostles, none have [*sic*] been more free from human imperfection and the wiles of Satan than was that of the autumn of 1844. Even now, after the lapse of many years, all who shared in that movement and who have stood firm upon the platform of truth still feel the holy influence of that blessed work and bear witness that it was of God.

At the call, "The Bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet Him," the waiting ones "arose and trimmed their lamps;" they studied the word of God with an intensity of interest before unknown. Angels were sent from heaven to arouse those who had become discouraged and prepare them to receive the message. The work did not stand in the wisdom and learning of men, but in the power of God. It was not the most talented, but the most humble and devoted, who were the first to hear and obey the call... The churches in general closed their doors against this message, and a large company of those who received it withdrew from their connection. In the providence of God this proclamation united with the second angel's message [Rev. 14:8] and gave power to that work.

The message, "Behold, the Bridegroom cometh!" was not so much a matter of argument, though the Scripture proof was clear and conclusive. There went with it an impelling power that moved the soul. There was no doubt, no questioning... [U]nbelievers who flocked to the Adventist meetings... [felt] the convincing power attending the message...<sup>12</sup>

The coming of Christ as our high priest to the most holy place, for the cleansing of the sanctuary,... is... represented by the coming of the bridegroom to the marriage, described by Christ in the parable of the ten virgins, [*sic*] of Matthew 25.

... The coming of the bridegroom... takes place before the marriage. The marriage represents the reception by Christ of His kingdom. The Holy City, the New Jerusalem, which is the capital and representative of the kingdom, is called "the bride, the Lamb's wife"... Revelation 21:9, 10. Clearly, then, the bride represents the Holy City, and the virgins that go out to meet the bridegroom are a symbol of the church. In the Revelation the people of God are said to be the guests at the marriage supper. Revelation 19:9. If *guests* [*sic*], they cannot be represented also as the *bride* [*sic*]. Christ... will receive from the Ancient of Days in heaven, "dominion, and glory, and a kingdom;" He will receive the New Jerusalem,... "prepared as a bride adorned for her husband." Daniel 7:14; Revelation 21:2. Having received the kingdom, He will come in His glory, as King of kings and Lord of lords, for the redemption of His people, who are... to partake of the marriage supper of the Lamb.

The proclamation, "Behold, the Bridegroom cometh," in the summer of 1844, led thousands to expect the immediate advent of the Lord. At the appointed time the Bridegroom came, not to the earth, as the people expected, but to the Ancient of Days in heaven, to the marriage, the reception of His kingdom. "They that were ready went in with Him to the marriage: and the door was shut." They were not to be present in person at the marriage; for it takes place in heaven, while they are upon the earth. The followers of Christ are to "wait for their Lord, when He will return from the wedding." Luke 12:36. But they are to understand His work, and to follow Him by faith as He goes in before God. It is in this sense that they are said to go in to the marriage.

In the parable it was those that had oil in their vessels with their lamps that went in to the marriage. Those who, with a knowledge of the truth from the Scriptures, had also the Spirit and grace of God, and who, in the night of their bitter trial, had patiently waited, searching the Bible for clearer light—these saw the truth concerning the sanctuary in heaven and the Saviour's change in ministration, and by faith they followed Him in His work in the sanctuary above. And all who through the

testimony of the Scriptures accept the same truths, following Christ by faith as He enters in before God to perform the last work of mediation, and at its close to receive His kingdom—all these are represented as going in to the marriage...

When the work of investigation shall be ended, when the cases of those who in all ages have professed to be followers of Christ have been examined and decided, then, and not till then, probation will close, and the door of mercy will be shut. Thus in the one short sentence, "They that were ready went in with Him to the marriage: and the door was shut," we are carried down through the Saviour's final ministration, to the time when the great work for man's salvation shall be completed.<sup>13</sup>

However, Jesus' parable of the wise and foolish virgins has *nothing* to do with the Millerites' Great Disappointment! As Ellen White well knows,<sup>14</sup> its extremely sharp focus is his **Return**. For one thing, its opening temporal adverb *to*<sup>15</sup> binds it to the closing caveats of 24:36-51. For another, its own caution, 25:13, echoes those of the latter *precisely, for the same reason* – a dearth of knowledge and seeming delay, 24:36, 42, 44, 50. Indeed, as its consequential conjunction *our*<sup>16</sup> clearly implies, *this is the very point of the entire parable!*

At very least, Ellen White's protracted eisegesis here raises very serious questions regarding her claim of divine inspiration. **Never** does God's Holy Spirit inspire fallacious, **literal** interpretations of sacred Scripture! At worst, it poses some questions concerning her reference to the Holy Spirit's **unqualified** blessing on the Millerite Movement, especially when it repeatedly taught completely erroneous interpretations of Dan. 8:14.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>1</sup> E.g., DA 234f., 628, 636; GC 37f., 393; PK 536f.; 5T 753 re "signs of the times" in general, and DA 631f.; GC 304-309, 333f. re the heavenly portents. However, it is refreshing to note that at times, as surveyed in my "Dogma", 22f., she can "shed" the shackles of historicism in the interests of more rational exegesis of sacred Scripture. In general, my abbreviations are standard, as detailed inside my "front cover".

<sup>2</sup> It is impossible to offer more than a morsel here. But the so-called Midnight Cry, purportedly fulfilling Mt. 25:6, speaks very eloquently to my point. Its earlier application, as @ my n. 12, can be traced back at least to Ellen White's 1SG, first published in 1858. Its later application is evident @ my n. 14. It may be objected that there really is no divergence since the Millerites were expecting the Return of Christ. However, she specifically claims: "I heard the voices of angels crying, Behold the Bridegroom cometh, go ye out to meet him!"; 1SG 140, stress supplied. It follows that her sentiments @ my n. 12 are a *reinterpretation* of Christ's parable specifically intended to rationalise that purported revelation.

<sup>3</sup> Outlined briefly in my "Blood", 2-4.

<sup>4</sup> EW 258f. Cf. CWE 31f.; 1SM 206f.; 2SM 101-104, 388f., 389f. *Per se*, such sectarian theology as these Three Angels' Messages of Rev. 14:6-13 offer the objective observer a superb opportunity to evaluate Ellen White's claims of angelic guidance. For angels cannot have had *any* part in *any* process of maturing theology by which her apologists defend her credentials. See briefly my cyberspace essay, "The Great Controversy Between Christ and Satan: How Biblical is Ellen White's Major Integrating Theme?", January, 2003, *passim*. The details of her theology of these denominationally crucial Three Angels' Messages are outlined briefly in my "Blood", 2-4, and critiqued adequately in my *ibid.*, 8-10.

<sup>5</sup> E.g., 1SM 208; 5T 455f. Here it is especially interesting to scrutinise Ellen White's own account of the process of recognising the pillars of SDA faith. Despite claims of *sola scriptura*, a careful reading of 1SM 206f. leaves no doubt that, in effect, her own visions were the final arbiter! Survivors of 1844 "searched for the truth as for hidden treasure. I met with them, and we studied and prayed earnestly. Often we remained together until late at night, and sometimes through the entire night, praying for light and studying the Word. Again and again these brethren came together to study the Bible, in order that they might know its meaning, and be prepared to teach it with power. When they came to the point in their study where they said, 'We can do nothing more,' the Spirit of the Lord would come upon me, I would be taken off in vision, and a clear explanation of the passages we had been studying would be given me, with instruction as to how we were to labor and teach effectively. Thus light was given that helped us to understand the scriptures in regard to Christ, His mission, and His priesthood. A line of truth extending from that time to the time when we shall enter the city of God, was made plain to me, and I gave to others the instruction..."

<sup>6</sup> 2SM 111f. Cf. *ibid.*, 101-104, 109-111, 387f.; Ev 223, 359f. She even "enlists" Satan in her cause! In revising GC in 1888 for public circulation, ch. 27 was omitted. But it has been preserved for SDA consumption as "Snares of Satan", TM 472-475. Here he affirms her dogma of a pre-Advent judgment, 472, and foreshadows his death decree for loyal SDAs, 473, and "unbelieving ones" to undermine their faith in her writings, 475!

<sup>7</sup> 1SM 208.

<sup>8</sup> CWE 32. Cf. 2SM 387f. Thankfully, though, this is not her only let alone prime word on the topic. E.g., she specifically directs SDAs to dialogue with sincere critics, lest they be labelled Pharisaic, CWE 44f., cf. 34, 35f., 36f. Moreover, should any critic be in error, they are duty bound to demonstrate this from Scripture, *ibid.*, 50f. But if not, they should stand beside him, *ibid.*, 43f. Nor are their crucial "fundamental articles of faith," *ibid.*, 40, exempt from careful review to ensure that they are based firmly on "sound arguments, that will... bear the closest and most searching scrutiny", *ibid.*! Indeed: "If the pillars of our faith will not stand the test test of investigation, it is time that we knew it", *ibid.*, 44! Nor can those, especially SDA officials, professing respect for Ellen White yet ignoring her critics equally pretend that this large slice of her writings is atypical, as evinced, among others, by her specific directives to employ sound arguments (Ev 166; GW 299; 5T 708), and respect critics (Ev 305f.; EW 102; GW 119, 372-374; MB 57f.; 1T 626, 649; 3T 220f.; 6T 120-122; 9T 239-244; TM 248). In brief: "Beneath an appearance of hatred and contempt, even beneath crime and degradation, may be hidden a soul that the grace of Christ will rescue", MB 130. "Therefore treat every man as honest", GW 374; 6T 122! Her apparent affliction with a rubber nose can be rationalised by observing that her stern warnings against *any* dialogue with critics of the fundamentals of SDA faith apply typically to *malicious opponents motivated by Satan himself*, as in my n. 6. Indeed, she expects expert, open-minded investigation to become a major factor in advancing the entire SDA cause! According to her Ev 69: "Every position of truth taken by our people will bear the criticism of the greatest minds; the highest of the world's great men will be brought in contact with truth, and therefore every position we take should be critically examined and tested by the Scriptures. Now we seem to be unnoticed, but this will not always be. Movements are at work to bring us to the front, and if our theories of truth can be picked to pieces by historians or the world's greatest men, it will be done."

<sup>9</sup> CWE 26.

<sup>10</sup> 2SM 388.

<sup>11</sup> E.g., the reinterpretation of Dan. 8:14 in terms of Christ cleansing God's heavenly Temple, EW 257f. However, Ellen White repeatedly affirms that Miller himself enjoyed heaven's specific, constant guidance, as in EW 229-232, 234; GC 317-342, 368-374, even though he embraced some serious heresy, GC 351-353. She even blames his rejection of the "Third Angel's Message" of the day upon others, certain that he will rise in the first resurrection: "God suffered him to fall under the power of Satan, the dominion of death, and hid him in the grave from those who were constantly drawing him from the truth. Moses erred as he was about to enter the Promised Land. So also, I saw that William Miller erred as he was soon to enter the heavenly Canaan, in suffering his influence to go against the truth. Others led him to this; others must account for it. But angels watch the precious duty of this servant of God, and he will come forth at the sound of the last trump"; EW 258.

<sup>12</sup> GC 393-402, selectively. Cf. 408; EW 14f., 42f., 238, 242, 248f., 260; LS 59; 1T 53f.; 2SM 388.

<sup>13</sup> GC 426-428, italics original. Cf. EW 55.

<sup>14</sup> E.g., COL 405-421. This book was first published in 1900.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> See my "Investigative Judgment", 20-23. Though this is no place for the details, nor does the historical evidence support her claim that the "ablest of their opponents had not succeeded in overthrowing their system of prophetic interpretation", GC 405. E.g., although Abel Tompkins' every rebuttal is scarcely watertight, in 1840 he certainly dismantled enough of Miller's argument with his open Bible to cast extremely grave doubts on his prime predictions, without the vast benefit of hindsight, [www.ex-sda.com/dowling](http://www.ex-sda.com/dowling). Cf. [www.ex-sda.com/cosmopolite](http://www.ex-sda.com/cosmopolite).

<sup>15</sup> *Supra*, 3.