

ENDTIME ISSUES NEWSLETTER No. 213

“THE IMMINENCE AND DISTANCE OF CHRIST’S RETURN”

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EDITORIAL

The recent collapse of major financial institutions, the intensification of natural disasters, the never-ending acts of terrorists, the attempt of Russia to control former soviet territories, are causing many Bible students to look at these developments as signs of the fast approaching End. Some readers of our Endtime Issues Newsletters have even proposed dates for the imminent Return of Christ.

There is no doubt in my mind that we are witnessing an unprecedented fulfillment of the Endtime Signs that point to the fast approaching Return of Christ. The problem is the attempt of some well-intentioned believers to satisfy human curiosity by prognosticating the exact timetable of the final events leading to the Second Advent. Some use Bible prophecies as a crystal ball to pinpoint the time of the End.

In the light of these developments, I decided to devote this newsletter to examine the overall Biblical teaching regarding the *time element* of the Parousia. A correct understanding of the time of the Advent can save believers from misguided hopes and expectations.

THE MEETING WITH NON-SAD HOSPITAL ADMINISTRATORS

At the invitation of Chaplain Farzad Nourian, I spoke on September 25 and 26 to the administrators of the Ormond Memorial and Flager Hospitals (near Daytona Beach), recently acquired by the Florida Hospital. My assignment was to help these non-SDA administrators understand how our Adventist beliefs impact on the quality of medical service provided by our Adventist hospitals.

For the sake of brevity I focused on the practical implications for medical service of our two fundamental beliefs: the Sabbath and the Second Advent. I pointed out that these two doctrines have a common denominator: they both invite us to meet the Lord in *time* on God's Holy Day, and in *space* on the glorious day of Christ's Coming. They both invite us to prepare to meet the Lord, not by withdrawing from the world, but by serving people.

For example, the Sabbath invites not only to serve God by giving priority to Him in our thinking and living on the seventh-day, but also by serving the needy. Christ serves as our model. He spent the Sabbath, not in splendid isolation, but by offering a living, loving service to needy people. This means that our Adventist Hospitals ought to be known for offering a caring, compassionate service to patients.

I also spent some time discussing how our Adventist holistic understanding of human nature, where the body, soul, and spirit form an indissoluble unit, determines our holistic medical service. Our Adventist hospitals should seek to heal patients not only physically, but also emotionally and spiritually. The call of our Adventist church, is not only to save souls, but to restore the whole person.

The response of the 200 plus administrators who attended the sessions, surpassed our fondest expectations. Some approached me saying that I had given them a lot to think about and were eager to read some of my books. Some ladies embraced Cristina Piccardi for touching their hearts with her powerful and passionate singing of the Holy City. A few attended our Advent Seminar presented at the Daytona Beach SDA Church. We came home with our hearts overflowing with gratitude to God for granting us the opportunity to minister to non-SDA hospital administrators and to our fellow believers.

TANZANIAN DISTRIBUTOR OF MY BOOKS

In the last newsletter I made a call for Adventists with marketing skills, interested to distribute my books in major English-speaking countries. The response has been encouraging. Several Adventists have contacted me and are now exploring the possibility of distributing my books in their countries.

At this time I am pleased to announce that Mr. Lazarus Lokaji Mollel from Dar-Es-Salaam, Tanzania has requested to become an official distributor of my books in Tanzania and neighboring African countries. He has already wired me the money for 1300 books which I am delivering to a sea-freight company in Chicago. The shipment should arrive in Dar-Es-Salaam in about a month. By shipping the books in large quantities by sea-freight, it reduces their cost by over 50%.

This is the complete name and address of Mr. Mollel:

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If you live in Tanzania, feel free to contact Lazarus Mollel by phone or email. You will save time and money. For example, the cost of airmailing to Tanzania one copy of *Popular Beliefs: Are They Biblical?* is \$40.00, that is, \$30.00 for the book and \$10.00 for the airmail. You can order the same book from Lazarus Mollel for less than half of the price. The reason is that the cost of sending the books by sea-freight is a fraction of the airmail.

For a description and picture of each book, click at this link:

<http://www.biblicalpherspectives.com/cart/catalog/index.php?cPath=26>

AUSTRALIAN DISTRIBUTOR OF MY BOOKS

At this time I am pleased to announce also that Ivan Jakovac, an Australian Adventist who operates a Storage Business, has requested to distribute my books and recordings in Australia at a considerable cheaper price than in the USA. The reason is that he has ordered a large quantity that is being shipped

by sea-freight, which costs a fraction of the airmail.

This is the name and address of the distributor:

Ivan Jakovac
Albury Storage
107 North Street
Albury NSW 2640
(Near Melbourne, Australia)

Phone 02 6021 8088

Mobile 0406 854 500

email: <ivan@alburystorage.com.au>

web site: <http://www.alburystorage.com/>

If you live in Australia, feel free to contact Ivan Jacovac by phone or email. You will save time and money. For example, the cost of airmailing to Australia one copy of *Popular Beliefs: Are They Biblical?* is \$40.00, that is, \$30.00 for the book and \$10.00 for the airmail. You can order the same book from Ivan Jakovac for less than half of the price. The reason is that I have shipped the books to Ivan by sea-freight, which costs a fraction of the airmail.

The first shipment should reach Ivan Jacovac in about a month. The reason for the delay is that we were out of stock during the past two weeks, while waiting for the third printing. So please allow some time for your order to be processed. In the future your orders be processed immediately.

For a description and picture of each book, click at this link:

<http://www.biblicalperspectives.com/cart/catalog/index.php?cPath=26>

SPANISH TRANSLATION OF *POPULAR BELIEFS: ARE THEY BIBLICAL?*

Hispanic readers of *Biblical Beliefs: Are They Biblical?* have been

urging me to translate and publish the book in Spanish as soon as possible. In fact, some of them have raised the money to pay for the translation, editing, art-work, and lay-out of the book.

The translation will be completed by October 10, 2008. Claudia Blath, a professional translator of the Asociacion Casa Editora Sudamericana has produced an excellent translation. According to our schedule the Spanish edition *LAS CREENCIAS POPULARES, ¿SON BÍBLICAS?* will be printed and ready for distribution by October 31, 2008. You can see the cover of the Spanish book and read a description by clicking at this link: <http://www.biblicalpherspectives.com/spanpop.htm>

To facilitate a massive distribution of *Las Creencias Populares, ¿Son Bíblicas?* we are offering the book at a special pre-publication price of \$5.00 per copy on quantity orders. For details click at this link <http://www.biblicalpherspectives.com/spanpop.htm> or call us at (269) 471-2915.

Your personal effort to inform Hispanic pastors and believers about the availability of *Las Creencias Populares, ¿Son Bíblicas?* is much appreciated.

RESOURCE BOOK FOR THE SABBATH SCHOOL LESSON ON THE ATONEMENT AND THE CROSS OF CHRIST

The current Sabbath School Quarterly for October to December 2008 deals with the *Atonement and the Cross of Christ*. If you are teaching or studying the Sabbath School Lesson, you will be pleased to know that I have written a book on this very subject entitled *The Passion of Christ in Scripture and History*. In this book I examine the *Centrality, Necessity, and Achievement of the Cross*.

The nature of the Sabbath School Lessons, meant to be used by the world-

church at large, does not afford the possibility to examine in some depth the significance of Christ's death. Its goal is to offer a simple outline of the major aspects of the subject.

In the next newsletters I plan to share the highlights of my study on the reasons for Christ's death, its achievements, and its benefits for our life today. If you are called to teach the Sabbath School or wish to deepen your understanding of *The Cross of Christ*, I would encourage you to order *The Passion of Christ in Scripture and History* by clicking at this link

http://www.biblicalperspectives.com/cart/catalog/product_info.php?cPath=21&products_id=45&osCsid=78b4f674ebbb6bda804cd257db6fc7fa or by calling us at (269) 471-2915.

Thank you for informing your Sabbath School Class Members about *The Passion of Christ in Scripture and History*. To make it possible for all your class members to have a copy of this timely book, we are offering it until October 31, 2008, for only \$5.00 per copy for an order of 20 copies. This means that you can order a case of 20 copies for only \$100.00. Mailing expenses are included in the price. The regular price of the book is \$25.00.

IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENTS AT THE END THIS ESSAY

- **Upcoming seminars in October**
- **Update on *Popular Beliefs: Are they Biblical?***
- **How to download the PDF version of my books**
- **The package of 14 DVD/CD albums for only \$150.00, instead of \$1650.00**
- **NEW HITACHI projector 3000 lumens for only \$1000.00**

“THE IMMINENCE AND DISTANCE OF CHRIST’S RETURN”

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

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

Objective of Essay

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

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

IMMINENCE/DISTANCE OF THE ADVENT IN THE OT

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

Amos, one of the earliest prophets, announces the day of the Lord (Amos 5:18-20) in the context of imminent divine judgments upon Damascus, Gaza, Tyre, Edom, Moab, Judah, and Israel (Amos 1:3 to 2:6). Jerusalem will be destroyed

by fire (Amos 2:5) and Israel will be razed by Assyria and Egypt (Amos 3:9-11). Beyond this *impending* divine visitation, Amos sees a more *distant* (eschatological) Day of the Lord which he describes as a day of universal judgment (Amos 7:4; 8:8-9; 9:5), and a day of salvation and restoration (Amos 9:13-15).

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

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

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

The sense of *distance* of this final Day of the Lord is sometimes expressed by Isaiah and other prophets by indefinite phrases such as “in the latter days,” “in that day,” “afterwards” (Is 2:2, 20; cf. Hos 3:5; Ezek 38:16; Jer 30:8; Joel 2:28-29).

IMMINENCE AND DISTANCE OF THE ADVENT IN THE NT

Imminence

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

James admonishes believers to "be patient" and not to grumble "for the coming of the *Lord is at hand* . . . the Judge is standing *at the doors*" (James 5:8-9). Similarly, Peter urges believers to "keep sane and sober" because "*the end of all things is at hand*:" (1 Pet 4:7; cf. Heb 10:25). The last book of the Bible opens by announcing "what must soon take place" (Rev 1:1) and closes by affirming, "Surely *I am coming soon*" (Rev 22:20).

Distance

Accompanying these "imminence verses" there are other passages which place the Parousia in a more distant future. A sense of distance is suggested by the precursory Advent signs given by Christ. For example, in Matthew 24:14 Jesus says: "And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world, as a testimony to all nations; and then the end will come." The time involved in reaching the whole world with the Gospel as well as the words "and then" imply the elapsing of considerable time before the Second Advent.

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

Parables

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

suggest the elapsing of considerable time before the Lord's Return. The unfaithful servant said: "My master *is delayed*" (Matt 24:48) and began living immorally and intemperately. The master rebuked the servant, not because of his awareness of the delay, but rather because of his irresponsible conduct during the delay.

In the parable of the Ten Virgins, "the bridegroom *was delayed*, [and] they all slumbered and slept" (Matt 25:5). The focus is on the conduct of the virgins during the *delay* of the bridegroom. The same point is made in the parable of the Talents, when it says: "Now *after a long time* the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them" (Matt 25:19).⁶

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

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

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

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

Paul

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

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

Revelation

As noted earlier, Revelation opens and closes announcing the soon-Coming of the Lord (Rev 1:1; 22:20; cf. 3:11). Yet throughout the book there is expressed a sense of long waiting before the Parousia. The martyrs cry: "O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, *how long* before thou wilt judge and avenge our blood?" (Rev 6:10).⁷ The answer they receive is "to rest a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brethren should be complete" (Rev 6:11).

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

In summary we might say that the New Testament presents the Second Coming of Christ in a seemingly paradoxical tension: *imminent* and yet possibly *distant*.

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

How can this tension between the *imminence* and *distance* of the Advent Hope be

resolved? The problem is not only *hermeneutical*, that is, how to interpret apparently contradictory texts, but also *existential*, that is, how to live in the consciousness of the nearness of Christ's Coming while accepting the possibility of a long waiting time.

A Crisis of Faith

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

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

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

No Crisis of Faith

A crisis of the Advent Hope is to be expected if such hope is based upon the presumption of knowing the date of the Second Advent, rather than on the experience of salvation already provided by Christ's First Advent. The New Testament Church was reconciled to a possibly long waiting time, because she was already experiencing the "first fruits" (Rom 8:23) of the future Advent "harvest" of blessings.

As long as a believer experiences in the present the blessings of salvation already provided through Christ's death, resurrection, and heavenly ministry, any

apparent “delay” of the Second Advent cannot lead to a crisis of faith. There are no traces in the New Testament Church of a crisis of faith regarding the Parousia. The Advent Hope of the earliest Christians was not shaken by any perception of an apparent “delay,” because, as Paul eloquently puts it, “I am sure that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ” (Phil 1:6).

Empirical Versus Existential Time of the Advent Hope

Distinguishing between two notions of time can help us resolve the New Testament tension between the imminence and distance of Christ’s Return. The first notion is *empirical time* which is measured by the clock. This is the common notion of time. The person who flies from Chicago to Los Angeles looks at the watch from time to time to see how many more hours or minutes still remain before the arrival. This empirical time is abstract, impersonal, and it can be fixed and measured with accuracy.

The second notion of time is *existential time* or perhaps “*lover’s time*.” This is the time which exists in the world of love and is measured not by the clock but by love and faith. In the world of love and hope time is real but it “flies.” The person who waits only for empirical, chronological time to pass finds such time to be unbearably slow. On the other hand, the person who experiences time in reference to a beloved person finds that time does in fact rush by. Of Jacob it is said that he “served *seven years* for Rachel, and they seemed to him but a *few days* because of the love he had for her” (Gen 29:20).

The notion of existential time experienced in a love-relationship can help us resolve the Biblical tension between the nearness and the remoteness of Christ’s Return. This tension vanishes when the event expected is the Return of a beloved Person. “Beloved,” write John, “we are God’s children now; it does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is” (1 John 3:2). The Advent is the occasion to see “face to face” the One whom now “we see in a mirror dimly” (1 Cor 13:12).

Measuring Time by Faith

The Christian eagerly awaits not an impersonal happening, but rather the Return of his beloved Lord. This faith enables the believer to live in the expectation of the imminent Coming of the Lord while conscious at the same time of the possibility of a long waiting period. Two persons who love one another have reason to hope to see one another soon, even if the separation is going to be chronologically rather long.

When I left my fiancée in Italy to come to the USA for my seminary training, we bade farewell to one another saying: “Time is going to pass quickly. Soon we are going to be together again.” We knew that we would be separated for at least a year, but we were measuring time not by the calendar, but rather by our love and faith. Since our lives were illuminated by the certainty of our future reunion, we chose to live in the awareness not of the long months of waiting but of the imminent reunion. Thus “soon” for us meant primarily *a certain reunion*.

This notion of time experienced in a love relationship offers us an important clue to understand the Biblical tension between the imminence and the distance of the Advent Hope. When a love relationship exists between the believer and Christ, living in the joyful expectation of His imminent Return becomes a natural necessity. To accept the present salvation that Christ offers us, without believing in His imminent Return, would be like becoming engaged without ever hoping to get married (Titus 2:13).

A Little While

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

The waiting time mentioned by Christ is “a little while,” not because it consists

of only a few years, but because during His absence we can live intensively in the reality of His love and the certainty of His Return. A short waiting time may seem like an eternity when one lives in the fear of uncertainty. On the other hand, years may seem like days when lived intensively and serenely in the certainty of the love of the expected person.

The Unity of the Advent Hope

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

One way already noticed is the dual meaning attached to the three terms *Parousia*, *Revelation*, and *Appearing*, which are used in the New Testament to designate both the past and the future Coming of Christ. This dual meaning indicates that for the New Testament believer the future Advent, though possibly distant, could be intensely felt as imminent, because it was conceptually and existentially linked to the reality of Christ's First Coming which inaugurated the End-time age.

The End of the Age

The unity of the Advent Hope is also expressed by such phrases as "the last days" and "the end of the age." Today, when we hear the expression "the end of the age" (Heb 9:26), we generally think not of the Incarnation but of the *Parousia*. In the New Testament, however, "the end of the age" is the age inaugurated by Christ when He came the first time "to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself" (Heb 9:26). Such age is also referred to as "the last days" (Acts 2:17), or "the end of times" (1 Pet 1:20). Christ inaugurated this final age by offering to believers the down payment of their future Advent inheritance.

The Second Advent is near because the believer already enjoys a foretaste of the blessings and privileges of the End-time. Having already experienced through the indwelling Spirit a taste of "the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come" (Heb 6:5), the believer lives in the expectancy of the

imminent consummation of salvation. Thus, the chronological distance to the Coming of the Lord is shortened through the initial experience of the ultimate blessing of the Kingdom.

The Lord's Prayer

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

The Lord's Supper

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

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

There is an essential unity among the events of the Incarnation, Crucifixion, Resurrection, Ascension, and Heavenly Ministration, and *Parousia*. This unity enables New Testament writers to reconcile the apparent tension between the imminence and the distance of the Second Advent, for it is the same expected Savior who has already appeared and who is presently appearing before the Father on our behalf, who ultimately "will appear a second time . . . to save those who are eagerly waiting for him" (Heb 9:24-28).

Moral Urgency of the Advent Hope

A third important reconciling clue is the ethical purpose of the nearness-remoteness tension. If Christ's Return had been tied to specific signs which made it possible to calculate chronologically either the nearness or the remoteness of the Event, then any preparation would be conditioned by the date factor. Knowing the date would tempt some to postpone to tomorrow the preparation that should be done today.

Preparation, not Calculation

The tension between imminence and distance fulfills a vital ethical function. It discourages date-setting and it calls for constant watchfulness and readiness. In the famous Olivet Discourse we find two distinct emphases: *nearness* and *remoteness*. *Nearness* is suggested by the significance of the given signs, namely, "that he is near, at the very gates" (Mark 13:29). *Remoteness* is indicated by the time needed for the signs to be fulfilled and more explicitly by the statement that even when they occur "the end is not yet" (Mark 13:7).

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

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

Constant Readiness

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

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

These observations indicate, then, that the tension between imminence and distance is an essential ingredient of the Advent Hope. By discouraging date-setting, this tension challenges believers to constant readiness and to experience in the present the certainty of the future Coming of the Lord.

The Prophetic Perspective of the Advent Hope

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

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

The same prophetic perspective is present in New Testament teaching. In Mark 13 the imminent destruction of Jerusalem (vv. 14-23) is presented in the immediate context of the Coming of the Son of Man (vv. 24-27). The first event is viewed as an anticipation of the final judgment to take place at the *Parousia*. As noted earlier, in Mark 9:1-3 the immediate (“after six days”—v. 2) glorious Transfiguration of Christ, is viewed as an anticipatory manifestation of the coming Kingdom.

What or When?

It is difficult for us—trained to measure time *quantitatively* rather than *qualitatively*—to appreciate the prophetic perspective. We measure time with our clocks and calendars in hours, days, months, and years in order to establish with accuracy *when* an event or action is to take place. In Biblical thought, however, the important question is often not “*When?*” but “*What?*”

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

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

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

Two Extremes

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

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

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

CONCLUSION

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

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

At this juncture some questions arise: What are the specific functions of the Advent signs? How do they relate to the imminence/distance tension we have discussed? Do the Advent signs point to the "nearness" of the Second Advent

merely in terms of existential certainty or also in terms of temporal closeness? These are some of the important questions to be considered in future newsletters.

ANNOUNCEMENTS OF SERVICES AND PRODUCTS

UPCOMING SEMINARS FOR OCTOBER

As a service to our subscribers, I am listing the seminars scheduled for the month of October 2008. We wish to extend a warm welcome to those of you who live close to the location of our seminars. Our new seminars with Words and Songs will touch your heart and expand your mind.

OCTOBER 3-4: LOS ANGELES: ROLLING HILLS SDA CHURCH

Location: 28340 Highridge Road, Rolling Hills Estates, CA 90274.

For directions and information call Pastor Jeff Rosenthal at (310) 541-1819

OCTOBER 10-11: MURRIETA SPRINGS SDA CHURCH

Location: 32477 Starback Circle, Murrieta, CA 92562

For directions and information call Pastor Lyndon Parsons at (951) 313-1668.

OCTOBER 31-NOVEMBER 1: ROSEVILLE SDA CHURCH

Location: 914 Cirby Way, Roseville, CA 95661

For directions and information call Pastor Roger at (916) 543-0287.

UPDATE ON *POPULAR BELIEFS: ARE THEY BIBLICAL?*

The third printing of *Popular Beliefs: Are they Biblical?* came out few days ago. We have now resumed the shipment to churches and institutions in the USA and overseas.

Popular Beliefs: Are they Biblical? is proving to be by far the most popular and best-selling book I have written. The reason is that the book meets the urgent need for a witnessing publication that Adventists can give with

confidence to people inquiring about our faith.

Many Adventists have emailed me messages of appreciation, saying that they have waited for years for a book like *Popular Beliefs* that shows why the most popular Catholic and Protestant popular beliefs are unbiblical, while the less-popular Adventist beliefs are biblically correct.

***Popular Beliefs* Adopted by Adventist Colleges and Seminaries**

Popular Beliefs is widely used not only for witnessing, but also for teaching at our colleges and theological seminaries. For example, we received orders from the School of Theology of Friedensau Adventist University in Germany. Prof. Denis Fortin, Dean of our Andrews University Theological Seminary, requested a supply for the class he teaches on Roman Catholic Theology.

Several professors told me that *Popular Beliefs* is ideal for some of their Bible classes, because it traces the historical origin and theological development of the major Catholic and Protestant heresies popular today.

As a church historian by training and profession, I have spent 15 months tracing historically and examining biblically 10 popular beliefs (heresies) in a calm, objective, and non-confrontational way. The ultimate goal is to lead ruth-seekers to appreciate the biblical validity and contemporary relevance of our Adventist beliefs.

Did Your Church Order a Supply of *Popular Beliefs*?

If your church has not yet order a supply of *Popular Beliefs*, we will be glad to process your order at this time, since we have just received the third printing.

Popular Beliefs is an ideal gift for any non-SDA attending evangelistic meetings this Fall. As you know, evangelistic lectures can only touch on the highlights of our message, leaving many questions unanswered in the mind of

the visitors. *Popular Beliefs* fill in the gaps by offering compelling answers to frequently asked questions.

To make it possible for many Adventist Churches to use *Popular Beliefs* for evangelistic outreach and for the personal growth, we offer the book at this time for only \$6.60 per copy for a case of 30 copies, instead of the regular price of \$30.00 per copy. This means that for \$200.00, your church can order a case of 30 copies of *Popular Beliefs*. We will pay the mail expenses to US destinations. The details for ordering the book are given at the end of the newsletter or by clicking at this link: http://www.biblicalperspectives.com/cart/catalog/index.php?cPath=26_35 or call us at (269) 471-2915.

Two Copies for the Price of One

At this time I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to all the pastors and lay-members who have actively promoted and distributed *Popular Beliefs* to their church members. Without your promotional efforts, the book would not have been reprinted three times in three months.

To make it possible for all our pastors and local church leaders to become acquainted with this timely book, we are offering until September 15, 2008, two copies of *Popular Beliefs: Are They Biblical?* for the price of one. This means that for \$30.00 you can order two copies, one for yourself and to give to your pastor or a local church leader.

After reading *Popular Beliefs* many pastors have ordered the book by the case of 30 copies for only \$6.60 per copy. Many churches have ordered 100 copies at the special offer of \$5.00 per copy, to give to non-SDA attending the Mark Findley's Satellite program Discoveries 2008 or other evangelistic meeting in the Fall.

But, there are still many pastors and churches that are unaware of the release of this powerful witnessing book *Popular Beliefs*. This newsletter reaches

only about 35,000 readers. Thus I need your help in promoting this timely book.

Thank you for introducing your pastor and local church officers to this timely book. To facilitate your effort, I am offering you two copies for the price of one. The details for ordering the book are given at the end of the newsletter or by clicking at this link: http://www.biblicalperspectives.com/cart/catalog/index.php?cPath=26_35 or call us at (269) 471-2915.

SPECIAL OFFER ON *POPULAR BELIEFS: ARE THEY BIBLICAL?*

To facilitate a massive circulation of Popular Beliefs, I have decided to continue to offer the book at the following substantially discounted prices:

2 copies of *Popular Beliefs: Are they Biblical?* for the price of one, namely \$30.00 for two copies. Mailing expenses are included for the USA. Add \$10.00 for AIRMAIL postage to any overseas destination.

10 copies of *Popular Beliefs: Are they Biblical?* at \$10.00 per copy, postage paid, instead of the regular price of \$30.00 (\$100.00 for 10 copies). Mailing expenses are included for the USA. Add \$50.00 for AIRMAIL postage to any overseas destination.

30 copies (one case) of *Popular Beliefs: Are they Biblical?* at \$6.65 per copy (\$200.00 for 30 copies). Mailing expenses are included for the USA. Add \$100.00 for AIRMAIL postage to any overseas destination.

100 copies of *Popular Beliefs: Are they Biblical?* at \$5.00 per copy, postage paid. (\$500.00 for 100 copies). Mailing expenses are included for the USA. Add \$300.00 for AIRMAIL postage to any overseas destination.

NOTE: We can ship by sea-freight up to 1000 copies of Popular Beliefs (up

to a cubit meter) to any foreign destinations for only \$500.00. This reduces the cost of mailing to only ¢50 per book. Fee free to contact me for further details.

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You can order *Popular Beliefs: Are they Biblical?* in four different ways:

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(2) PHONE: By calling us at (269) 471-2915 to give us your credit card number and postal address.

(3) EMAIL: By emailing your order to [<sbacchiocchi@biblicalpherspectives.com>](mailto:sbacchiocchi@biblicalpherspectives.com). Be sure to provide your postal address, credit card number, and expiration date.

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This package contains 41 professionally recorded live, video lectures with all the lectures of Prof. Bacchiocchi, Prof. Jon Paulien, Prof. Roy Gane, Prof. Graeme Bradford, and Soprano Cristina Piccardi.

Until now these recordings were sold separately, costing considerably more. But to make it possible for many to benefit from all these timely messages, we offer them together as a package for only \$150.00, instead of the regular price of \$1650.00.

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- 2) PROF. BACCHIOCCHI'S newly recorded DVD ALBUM called**

ABUNDANT LIFE SEMINAR. The album contains 2 video powerpoint lectures: The Christian and Alcoholic Beverages and How to Build a Happy and Lasting Marriage. These two lectures summarize the highlights of Bacchiocchi's two books Wine in the Bible and The Marriage Covenant. Two separate files with 225 powerpoint slides are included.

3) PROF. BACCHIOCCHI'S DVD ALBUM containing 10 video powerpoint lectures on the SABBATH/ADVENT SEMINAR. Some of the lectures show the documents Prof. Bacchiocchi found in Vatican libraries on the role of the papacy in changing the Sabbath to Sunday. This album contains the popular powerpoint SABBATH/ADVENT seminars Prof. Bacchiocchi presents in many countries.

4) PROF. BACCHIOCCHI'S DVD ALBUM on CRACKING THE DA VINCI CODE. The album contains a two hours video lecture, professionally taped with a virtual studio as a background. A separate file with 200 powerpoint slides is included. The two video lectures reveal the prophetic significance of Dan Brown's neo-pagan false worship promoted through his book and film. The two hours video lectures will help you appreciate the role that The Da Vinci Code plays in the prophetic endtime battle between true and false worship.

5) PROF. BACCHIOCCHI'S DVD ALBUM on THE MARK AND NUMBER OF THE BEAST. The album contains two hours professionally recorded video lecture and a separate powerpoint file with the 200 slides used for the lecture. The project was commissioned by Prof. Jon Paulien and Prof. Ranko Stefanovich, who are the foremost authorities on the book of Revelation. With the help of 200 beautiful slides the video lecture shows the origin and historical use of 666. You will see stunning pictures of papal tiaras, including disputed one with the pope's title *Vicarius Filii Dei*.

6) PROF. BACCHIOCCHI'S CD ALBUM with all his BOOKS AND POWERPOINT LECTURES. The album consists of two disks. The first disk has all his 20 books and over 200 articles. The second disk has the 2000

slides and script of 25 of Prof. Bacchiocchi's popular PowerPoint presentations.

7) PROF. BACCHIOCCHI'S DVD ALBUM on THE PASSION OF CHRIST. The album contains the 2 hours live interview conducted by 3ABN on Prof. Bacchiocchi's book *The Passion of Christ in Scripture and History*. The live video interview show that that this movie is a strict Catholic film that in a subtle and deceptive way promotes fundamental Catholic heresies.

8) PROF. BACCHIOCCHI'S MP3 AUDIO ALBUM which contains 2 disks with 22 AUDIO LECTURES on on Marriage, Music, Temperance, Dress, Sabbath, Second Advent, State of the Dead, and others. You can enjoy these lectures while driving, working, or relaxing. Ideal for listening in your car while driving.

9) PROF. JON PAULIEN'S newly released DVD ALBUM video seminar on *Simply Revelation*. The four live video lectures focus on the essential messages of Revelation and their relevance for today. This mini Revelation Seminar will offer you and your congregation fresh insights into the Book of Revelation. Currently, Prof. Paulien is preparing a new Revelation Seminar at the request of the General Conference

10) PROF. JON PAULIEN'S CD ALBUM with a dozen of his books, and all his articles. You will find in this collection a priceless resource to enrich your understanding and experience of biblical truths. Prof. Paulien examines fundamental biblical beliefs in a profound and yet popular way. He is a recognized expert on the book of Revelation. Several of his books will help you to unlock the secrets of Revelation.

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Bradford's published and unpublished writings, including his the latest book More than a Prophet.

12) CRISTINA PICCARDI'S CD ALBUM REJOICE IN THE LORD.

The album consists of 11 sacred songs recorded with Marcelo Caceres, Professor of piano at Andrews University. The CD Album includes Gospel songs like How Great Thou Art, He Shall Feed His Flock, Softly and Tenderly, The Holy City, etc. You can play this audio recording in your car CD player, or on any CD or DVD players you have in your home.

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INCREDIBLE NEW OFFERS ON HITACHI PROJECTORS

HITACHI has released the new CP-X401 3000 lumens projector, which has an impressive high resolution, low fan noise, and a wealth of connectivity options. **The most impressive feature of this projector is the incredible price of only \$1000.00 to help especially our churches and schools in developing countries.** The projector can be purchased with or without accessories such as the **REMOTE PRESENTER** to control the flow of images in the lap-top.

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DOES YOUR CHURCH OR SCHOOL NEED A SCREEN?

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website at <http://www.da-lite.com>. You will see hundreds of models of screens with their respective prices. Once you find the screen that best suits your church, give us the model number by phone (269) 471-2915 or email your request [<sbacchiocchi@biblicalperspectives.com>](mailto:sbacchiocchi@biblicalperspectives.com) We will forward your order immediately to DA-LITE that will ship the screen directly to your address. You will receive the screen at about 30% discount.

BED & BREAKFAST FACILITIES IN LONDON, ENGLAND

If your travel plans call for a stop in London, you will be pleased to learn about a most gracious Adventist couple that offer the best accommodation and breakfast I have ever enjoyed. It has become my home away from home when in London. See details at: <http://www.biblicalperspectives.com/Promotions/BED&BREAKFAST.htm>
Their new home phone numbers are: 020 8429-3140 or 020 8819-5708