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## Apocalypse Now

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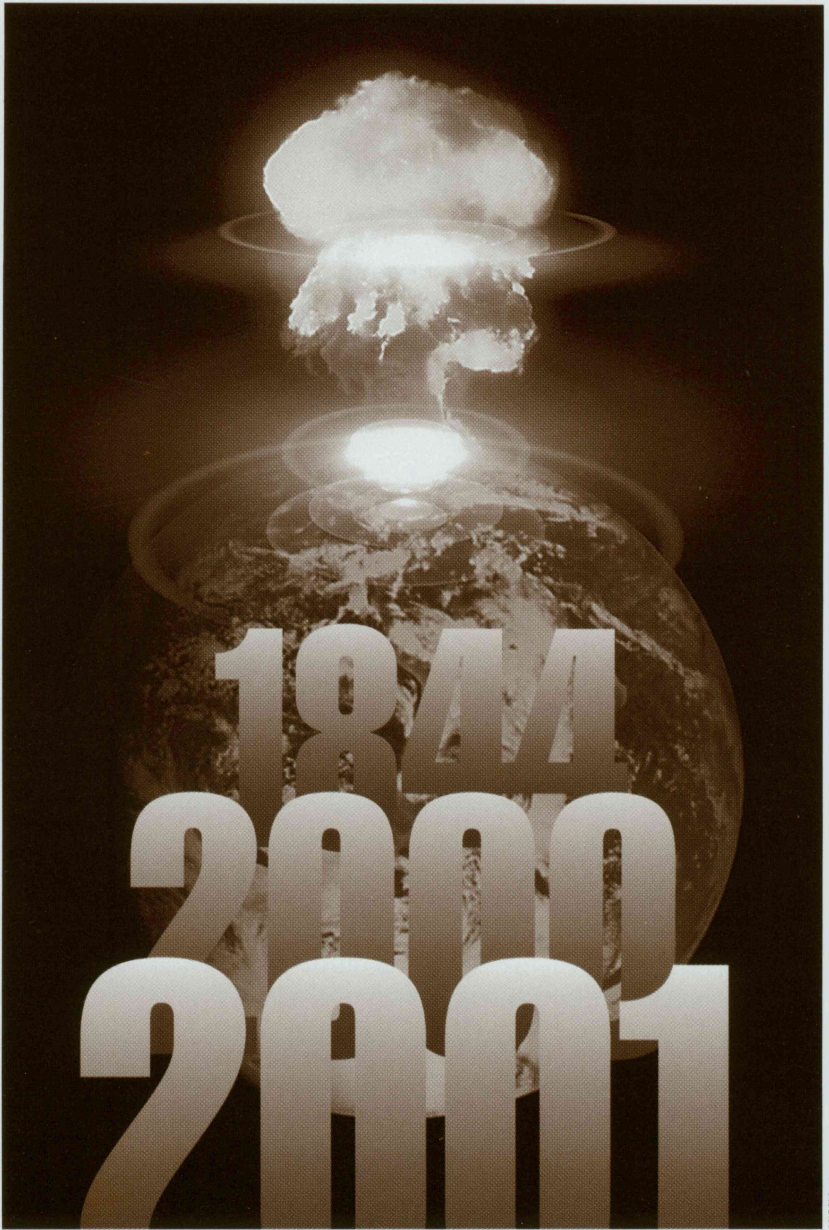
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# APOCALYPSE NOW!

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If you've passed through a check-out counter at your neighborhood supermarket recently, you could hardly escape seeing the dramatic headline screaming from a tabloid news magazine called *Sun*:<sup>1</sup>

**"BIBLE END TIMES ARE HERE!"**

The headline was preceded by a **"CAUTION TO READERS:**

**"The message inside may terrify some people. Be careful about sharing it with others."**

The inside spread assured readers that "End Time prophecies are not vague glimmers of future knowledge. They are deliberate echoes into the future, inspired by God and breathed out by men and women."

"These assuring words," readers were told, "come from a disturbing new Domsday book *End-Time Prophecies of the Bible*."

Its author, a Dr. T. Mark Slaughter, is quoted as saying: "The time of the Second Coming is very close, perhaps no more than six weeks away."<sup>2</sup> (See box at end of article.)

Depending on your spiritual status, you may be happy to hear that the six weeks are now about 11 months in the past. Whatever your spiritual status, you should know that such predictions are proliferating with the advent of the Third Millennium. And someday they'll not be wrong. . . .

In *PD* 5:1/2000, I discussed (and dismissed as biblically invalid) time-setting based on millennial reckoning and jubilee calculations. But

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**In his book, *The Cultic Doctrine of Seventh-day Adventists*, Dale Ratzlaff, once a Seventh-day Adventist minister, accuses us of using complicated eisegesis to support 1844, a key pillar of our sanctuary doctrine. This prophetic date affirms the imminence of Christ's return because the pre-advent judgment immediately precedes the Second Coming.**

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what of the time prophecies, especially the 2300 days, which Adventists often cite as evidence for Christ's "imminent" return? Do they offer a biblically sound assurance for the imminent Advent? If so, do Adventist date-setters operate on a more laudable hermeneutic than the writers quoted in the tabloid?

#### How Long Shall It Be?

The Second Coming is not given as the termination point of any biblical prophecy. Daniel 12:12 does pronounce a blessing on "those who persevere and attain the thousand three hundred thirty-five days" (NRSV).\*\* William Miller did interpret the cleansing of the sanctuary as reference to the cleansing of the earth at Christ's coming. But the Bible doesn't present time prophecy as a means to pinpoint the

precise time of Christ's return. Nevertheless, some eschatologists have not been deterred from suggesting, on the basis of a time prophecy, a date for the end of the present era.

For example: In Daniel 12:6, the question is asked: "How long shall it be until the end of these wonders?" The answer: "A time, two times, and half a time." Daniel didn't understand the answer, so further elaboration is given in verses 11 and 12, which refer to 1290 and 1335 days. Here's how Stephen Skinner interprets these figures in his book *Millennium Prophecies*:

"How should we reconcile these conflicting dates? It could be that after the destruction of the Temple in A.D. 70 there were 1290 'days' times one and a half ('time, and a half'). This would yield 1935+70, a beginning of apocalyptic events in 2005 A.D. . . . Using the same logic on 1335, the final resurrection of the dead should take place halfway through the year A.D. 2072, when

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\*\*Unless otherwise noted, all Bible texts in this article are quoted from the New Revised Standard Version.

the blessed who have waited will ascend to the stars.”<sup>3</sup>

Who said that the 1290 and 1335 days start with the destruction of the second temple in A.D. 70? Not the inspired author of the Book. Stephen Skinner. Why not start from an event closer to Daniel’s time? The most remarkable twist of this eschatological eisegesis (reading one’s opinion into the text rather than deriving truth from it) is its multiplication of “time, times, and a half.” Skinner interprets Daniel’s “times” to mean “multiply,” an interpretation foreign to the Hebrew text. Then he adds the first and third units in the phrase “time. . . and a half,” to arrive at “one and a half.” Multiply 1290 and 1335 by one and a half, add the results to A.D. 70, the assumed starting point and—nonsense. This whole procedure adds up to playing games with the text.

#### An Ex-Adventist Player

We are comfortable criticizing Skinner’s methodology. But are we also guilty of imposing our views on a text—such as, for example, the 2300-day prophecy of Daniel 8:14? Dale Ratzlaff, once a Seventh-day Adventist minister, says Yes. In his book, *The Cultic Doctrine of Seventh-day Adventists*, he accuses us of using complicated eisegesis to support 1844, a key pillar of our sanctuary doctrine. This prophetic date affirms the imminence of Christ’s

return because the pre-advent judgment immediately precedes the Second Coming.

Ratzlaff begins by describing and critiquing various early Adventist attempts to unlock biblical time prophecies. For example, he refers to William Miller’s attempt to establish 1843 as the year of Christ’s coming. Miller, says Ratzlaff, interpreted the number of the beast, 666 (Rev. 13:18) as a time period under pagan Rome lasting from 158 B.C. to A.D. 508, when the so-called “daily” was taken away. Having discredited William Miller’s hermeneutical reliability, he turns to our interpretation of Daniel 8:14 and the 2300 days, which grew out of Miller’s study. For one thing, Ratzlaff points out, the Hebrew of Daniel 8:14 reads literally “evening morning 2300,” which many scholars understand in light of verse 26 (the evening and the morning) to be 2300 half days, or 1150 full days.<sup>4</sup>

By comparing the syntax of Daniel 8:14 and 26 with Hebrew expressions for time elsewhere, I have found that the number 2300 applies to both “evening” and “morning” as an abbreviation for “evenings 2300 and mornings 2300.” Therefore, just as the expression “forty days and forty nights” (Gen. 7:4, 12, etc.) refers to 40 full days, Daniel 8:14 refers to 2300 full days.

We have pruned our eschatology radically since the days of William



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Miller, but I see no biblical reason to bury our understanding of the 2300 days as an unbiblical skeleton in our theological closet.

#### Prophetic Imminence

Still, the question remains: On the basis of time prophecies, can we fix a date for Christ's return? It would seem, at least, that we could, in the prophetic context, speak of the imminence of His return. Ellen White believed that Christ could have come in her lifetime.<sup>5</sup> In addition, her acceptance of an approximate 6,000-year age for the earth and our position on 1844 would seem to encourage belief in Christ's return after six millennia of sin. Of course, the 6,000-year concept is not our 28th fundamental belief. And, as I pointed out in my previous article, we have no exact date for Creation; readily available evidence shows we are already more than 2,000 years past Christ's birth and thus in excess of 6,000 years from Usher's Creation date; and the Septuagint's chronology is 1,500 years longer between

Creation and Abraham than the chronology of the Hebrew Bible, which Usher used.<sup>6</sup>

Though 1844 implies imminence, knowing that Christ could come at any time does not put the seal of a biblically correct hermeneutic on attempts to pinpoint the date. We cannot, as stock market speculators attempt to do, run prophetic data into a computer and have it spit out the answer. God is going to come when He determines "[i]t is done" (Rev. 16:17). Peter said that we have the privilege of waiting for and even hastening "the coming of the day of God" (2 Peter 3:12), but we don't have the power to trigger it, or even to start the "latter rain" by what we do.

Surely world conditions accentuate the need of urgent witness. Though we've made some advances since 1844—slavery is out in most of the world, and the Holocaust is widely condemned—the world seems in an inexorable downward spiral. A look at the evening news is an education in strife, suffering, and

moral decay in perpetually replicating permutations. Expanding electronic media witness to a world becoming a cornucopia of concupiscent. The world teeters on the verge of economic chaos. The pessimist might say that things cannot possibly get worse. The optimist could respond: "They surely will!"

### Still "Doing Time"

We are left with the problem that it is now the third millennium—more than a century and a half since 1844. Time prophecy has ended, but we're still "doing time." Clearly, there has been a delay of the Advent, as Jesus hinted there could be (Matt. 24:45-51). Prophets such as Habakkuk and Peter indicated that delays do not invalidate prophecy (Hab. 2:3; 2 Peter 3:8-10). "Though the mills of God grind slowly, yet they grind exceedingly small."

But why this long? The idea that God needs more than a century and a half to carry out His judgment challenges our credulity. Consequently, 1844 as the beginning of such a judgment can seem an embarrassment. A common explanation is that we had an opportunity to enter the heavenly Canaan, but we have been "wandering in the wilderness" because of our failures, just as the Israelites on the borders of literal Canaan turned away at Kadesh-barnea. Most often cited in our history is the failure to wholeheartedly embrace righteous-

ness by faith in 1888. Whatever, we can't go back to Minneapolis and undo history. It doesn't work that way. The Israelites had to go on. And so do we. We will be always on the move if we follow God's leading.

Peter advances another reason for delay: "But do not ignore this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like one day. The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some think of slowness, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:8, 9).

This concept is well represented in the Old Testament. For example, in Genesis 15, God told Abram that his descendants would be oppressed in another land for 400 years (vs. 13), but that they would return "in the fourth generation; for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete" (vs. 16). So out of compassion for this small group of western Semites who inhabited Canaan, God kept His people waiting. And waiting. Four hundred years. For a small group of people. When we're talking about the entire population of Planet Earth, maybe 156 years since 1844 isn't such a long time after all. . . .

### Apocalypse Now

We cannot set a valid date for the Second Coming on the basis of biblical time prophecies any more than we can predict Christ's return on the

basis of millennial or jubilee cycles. But Daniel 8:14 does indicate that we are living in the “last days.” Nevertheless, while we long to see our Lord end the present age, we are troubled by His apparent delay. The reason is not clear to us; however, we are comforted to think that God is doing things this way at least partially for people who otherwise would not be saved.

In these pregnant days of the third millennium, many—momen-

tarily disturbed by such headlines as those in the *Sun*—await “the apocalypse,” some kind of cataclysmic event that they expect to imminently precede the birth of a new age. But this is not the biblical meaning of *apocalypse*, which comes from the Greek *apokalupsis*. In Revelation 1:1, it is the “revelation” of (from and about) Jesus Christ. Here, indeed, is a message that we need not, in the words of the *Sun*, “be careful about sharing. . . with others.” The Book of

## END TIMES HAVE ARRIVED

The *Sun* tabloid quotes “Leading Bible expert Dr. T. Mark Slaughter,” author of *The Last Days of Earth*, on the following “Ten Sure Signs That End Times Have Arrived”:

1. An increase in the number and severity of earthquakes, like the terror tremor that recently slammed Turkey, killing 10,000 people.

*“For nation shall rise against nation, and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes in divers places”* (Matt. 24:7, KJV).†

2. New killer viruses, like super strains of drug-resistant tuberculosis and influenza, are ravaging the Earth, infecting and killing by the tens of thousands.

*“And I will plead against him with pestilence and with blood”* (Eze. 38:22).

3. Raging forest fires are sweeping the United States from coast to coast, and in many places in Europe and South America devastating fires are torching millions of acres of once-valuable woodland.

*“The Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels . . . by flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God”* (2 Thess. 1:7, 8).



Revelation reveals a sweep of human history moving inexorably from John's time to the *eschaton*.<sup>7</sup> In this sense, we have been in apocalyptic time all along. Though the culmination is not yet, we are living in the apocalypse now. □

#### REFERENCES

<sup>1</sup> *Sun*, October 26, 1999.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20.

<sup>3</sup> Stephen Skinner, *Millennium Prophecies* (New York: Barnes & Noble Books, 1997), p. 15.

<sup>4</sup> Dale Ratzlaff, *The Cultic Doctrine of Seventh-day Adventists* (Sedona, Ariz.: Life Assurance Ministries, 1996), p. 76.

<sup>5</sup> Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publ. Assn., 1958), Book 1, p. 68.

<sup>6</sup> See Roy Gane, "Apocalypse Not Yet," *Perspective Digest* 5:1 (2000), p. 60.

<sup>7</sup> On cosmic sweep as a feature of apocalyptic literature, see Kenneth Strand, "Foundational Principles of Interpretation," *Symposium on Revelation—Book 1, Daniel and Revelation Committee Series*, Frank Holbrook, ed. (Silver Spring, Md.: Biblical Research Institute, 1992), pp. 12, 13.

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4. Killer storms, including hurricanes and tornadoes, are growing in number and intensity. Scientists say the East Coast of the United States will be hammered by a new breed of devastating super-hurricane over the next 10 years. Projected death tolls and damage figures are off the scale.

*"And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it"* (Matt. 7:27).

5. The secrets of the universe are being revealed as more and more powerful telescopes mounted on satellites explore the heavens. [Dr. Slaughter says he's spoken to astronomers who say that the sum of man's knowledge is already "greater than God's."]

*"For the stars of heaven and the constellations thereof shall not give their light. . . and I will punish the world for their evil. . . and I will cause the arrogance of the proud to cease"* (Isa. 13:10, 11).

6. The unification of Europe is now complete, and there is increasingly urgent talk of a single currency under a single government. "The time is now right for the rise of the antichrist and the fulfillment of Bible prophecy that Europe will be united when this man of evil steps from the wings on to the center stage of mankind's destiny," Dr. Slaughter says.

*"Ye have heard that the antichrist shall come. . . whereby we know it is the last time"* (1 John 2:18).

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7. Wars are raging all over the world and ethnic conflicts are escalating. Dr. Slaughter and other Bible experts expect a worldwide nuclear holocaust within two years. The flashpoints that will plunge the world into a new Dark Age of terror could be a Chinese attack on its breakaway province of Taiwan or a nuclear exchange between India and Pakistan over the disputed territory of Kashmir.

*“And ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars. . . . For nation shall rise against nation. . . . All these are the beginning of sorrows”* (Matt. 24:6-8).

8. The gospel of “love God with all thy being, and thy neighbor as thyself;” is now being preached in every nation on Earth, a certain sign that the Last Days are imminent, Dr. Slaughter says.

*“And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world as a witness unto all nations, and THEN SHALL THE END COME”* (Matt. 24:14).

9 & 10. Dr. Slaughter says the final two signs of the End Times are about to happen.

THE FIRST will be a strange event in the heavens that he and other experts placed on or about New Year’s Day 2000. In Acts 2:20 we are told that this spectacular celestial happening will be a sign of the Second Coming:

*“The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood before that great and notable day of the Lord come.”*

Biblical experts say this could be a complete eclipse of the sun that will darken the moon and turn it a burnished red color.

THE SECOND is the straightforward prophecy made by Jesus in Matthew 9:34 and 35 that MOST OF US NOW ALIVE WILL SEE THE SECOND COMING!

*“Verily I say unto you,”* Jesus said, *“This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled.”*

Most great biblical experts, including Dr. Slaughter, Billy Graham, Benny Hinn, Oral Roberts, Robert Schuller, and Jerry Falwell agree that THE TIME AT THE END OF TIME is close at hand.

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†Bible quotes in this box are taken from the King James Version.