

EXCUSES – EXCUSES FOR SHUNNING THE STUDY OF END-TIME ISSUES

This marvelous revival occurred because people responded to Scriptural evidence that they were at the end of time! Now, over 150 years later, we have once again been submerged into final events that God's word predicted. *Never before* have prophetic events suggested that the second coming of Jesus is so near as right now! Yet within the ranks of advent believers, a growing number of reasons not to expectantly deal with this issue has surfaced. That is so different from 1844. Then, it is estimated, that 30-70% of some cities were looking for Jesus to come, including Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Today one is almost invited to apologize when talking of *why* His coming is expectant. With the deepest concern, we invite everyone to evaluate this issue and then *question*: "*Do the events now transpiring show that something is different now than it ever has been before? Is end-time prophecy being fulfilled?*"

Here are four excuses why many Adventists avoid these two questions. Here are four reasons why most Adventists won't be ready.

Excuse One: The study of end-time issues is misguided because it places undue emphasis on a topic "that has little to do with our salvation." This is made frequently. Time and again we are challenged: "Our efforts must be centered on Jesus and Him alone. To delve into current events is distracting. When things happen they happen. Let's be Christ-centered and not crises-centered."

Before Jesus' first coming "the earth was dark through misapprehension of God." *Desire of Ages*, p. 22. "For more than a thousand years the Jewish people had awaited the Saviour's coming. And yet, at His coming *they knew Him not.*" *Desire of Ages*, p. 27. [All emphases added unless noted] "He came unto His own, and His own received Him not." John 1:11. "While the Jews desired the advent of the Messiah, they had no true conception of His mission." *Desire of Ages*, p. 29,30. "Pride obscured their vision. They interpreted prophecy in accordance with their selfish desires." *Desire of Ages*, p. 30. His *chosen* advent people were blinded and unprepared when the Saviour made His debut into this world's scene.

It was generally believed that when He should come it would be plain. But this naive conviction actually distorted Israel's view of who the Messiah was to be. Prophecy was clear as to when He would come, why He would come, how He would come and what He would do. Failure to know prophetic issues led to a failure of knowing Him!

There was, however, a glimmer of hope that pierced the gloom of this terrible tragedy of neglect. But, this flicker of light did *not* come from among the chosen of Israel. It came from "non-chosen" Adventists.

"Outside of the Jewish nation there were men who foretold the appearance of a divine instructor. These men were seeking for truth, and *to them the Spirit of Inspiration was imparted.* One after another, like stars in the darkened heavens, such teachers had arisen.

The words of prophecy had kindled hope in the hearts of thousands of the Gentile world.

“For *hundreds* of years the Scriptures had been translated into the Greek language, then widely spoken throughout the Roman Empire. The Jews were scattered everywhere, and their expectation of the Messiah’s coming was to some extent shared by the Gentiles. *Among those whom the Jews styled heathen were men who had a better understanding of the Scripture prophecies concerning the Messiah than had the teachers in Israel.*” *Desire of Ages*, p. 33.

The prejudiced mind of God’s people biased their discernment. Bigotry spawned apathy. And, it could be truly said that, “My people perish for lack of knowledge.” The Jewish people were proud of their opinions. But their vision of truth was obscured. Yet, the words of prophecy and the study of unfolding events kindled hope in the hearts of thousands outside the fold.

The wise men from the “East” had been “studying treasured prophetic writings that predicted the coming of a divine teacher.” *Desire of Ages*, p. 59. To obtain clearer and deeper knowledge, they also turned to the Hebrew Scriptures. Through prophecy these men learned with joy that His coming was near. When the star appeared, they were convicted and knew the time had come. They said over and over as they traveled west, “We have seen *His* star.” “We have come to worship *Him*.”

Another non-Jewish group of beings were thrilled at the first Advent:

“Events upon which *the attention of all heaven is centered* are undiscerned, their very occurrence is unnoticed, by religious leaders, and worshipers in the house of God.” *Desire of Ages*, p. 56. With keen anticipation heavenly beings watched the unfolding promises as the hearts of men were, to their amazement, cloaked in darkness.

The parable of the marriage feast in Matthew 22 is a fascinating allegory of God’s people just prior to His second coming. Many advent Christians who received a personal invitation to the wedding feast had excuses why they couldn’t attend the wedding. Jesus said the “*remnant* took His servants and entreated them spitefully...” vs. 6. The remnant is the apple of His eye. John talks about it in Revelation 12. Paul says with eager hope: “Even so then at this present time also there is a *remnant* according to the election of grace.” Romans 11:5 But the *remnant* rejected Him! Then the invitation went out to everyone. It was from this “*everyone group*” that the guests at the marriage feast were made up.

The destiny of the church hangs on a correct understanding of the hour we are in. From that enlightened position, God’s people are given the *authority* to call sin by its right name, to proclaim a straight testimony within and without the church and to sound the first note of the Loud Cry, defining what the gospel of Jesus really is. It is from this *illuminated authority* that a call to a dying world will reverberate everywhere.

This impelled E. G. White to pen over 100 years ago:

“As we near the close of this world’s history, the prophecies relating to the last days especially demand our study.” *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 133.

Why is this so vital?

“The work of the people of God is to prepare for the events of the *future*, which will soon come upon them with *blinding force*.” *Maranatha*, p.182.

Paul made it clear that for God’s people, studying end-time events is necessary!

“But ye, brethren, are *not* in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief.” I Thessalonians. 5:4.

“So in the prophecies the future is opened before us *as plainly* as it was opened to the disciples by the words of Christ. The events connected with the close of probation and the work of preparation for the time of trouble *are clearly presented*. But multitudes have no more understanding of these important truths than if they had never been revealed.” *Maranatha*, p. 258.

We run the same terrible risk that the Jewish leaders experienced prior to Jesus’ first advent. The routine ceremonies of worship brought no more spiritual healing than today. The message for this time is urgent and bears eternal weight. The call of the Scripture is to prepare.

“The whole universe is watching with inexpressible interest the *closing scenes* of the great controversy between good and evil.” *Prophets and Kings*, p. 148 (c1914). Why are so few of God’s people watching?

Excuse Two: The study of end time issues suggests we are “time setting.” This is a very serious escape from God’s implicit counsel: “When ye see the fig tree put forth leaves, ye know that summer is nigh. So likewise when ye shall see *all these things*, know that it is near, *even at the doors*.” Matthew 24:32, 33. What is Jesus saying? A collective understanding of the signs helps us to know His coming is upon us. Then He says, “Watch therefore” vs. 42. “Therefore be ye also ready.” vs. 44. In vs. 13 He said, “... He that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved.” The signs call us to repentance and preparation, to be ready to endure, to not give up, just a little while then and He that shall come will come and not tarry.

So critical is this issue, we are told:

“The solemn messages that have been given *in their order* in the Revelation are to occupy the *first place* in the minds of God’s people.” *Testimonies*, vol. 8, p. 302 (1904). This is awesome. It is of *primary* concern to advent Christians to focus on a revelation of Jesus in the context of end times! And – the messages have an order that we are to concentrate on. The book of Revelation gives not only the most profound prophetic insight into last day events but often defines the *sequence of events*. Revelation 11-19 are excellent examples.

Ellen G. White, beyond the enlightened spiritual truths she brings to Seventh-day Adventists, has given to us another gift: throughout her writings she also makes statements guiding our understanding of the *sequence of last day events*!

Examples include: “Before giving us the baptism of the Holy Spirit, our heavenly Father will try us, to see if we can live without dishonoring Him.” *Selected Messages*, bk 2, p. 427. “... I saw that the anger of the nations, the wrath of God, and the time to judge the dead were separate and distinct, *one following the other...*” *Maranatha*, p. 258. “Before the work is closed up and the sealing of God’s people is finished, we shall receive the outpouring of the Spirit of God.” *Selected Messages*, bk 1, p. 111. “The great issue so near at hand will *weed out* those whom God has not appointed and He will have a pure, true, sanctified ministry prepared for the [coming] latter rain...” *Selected Messages*, bk 3, p. 385.

Is that time setting? Never! It is a beautiful expose’ of the steps which the last events of this earth’s history will take.

“There is need of a much closer study of the Word of God; especially should Daniel and the Revelation have attention as never before.... *The light that Daniel received from God was given especially for these last days.*” *Testimonies to Ministers*, pp. 112,113 (1896).

Let us read and study the twelfth chapter of Daniel. It is a warning that we shall all need to understand before the time of the end.” *Manuscript Release*, 15, p. 288 (1903).

“The last book of the New Testament scriptures is full of truth that we need to understand.” *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 133 (1900).

The study of the *Great Week of Time* is currently under much scrutiny within the Adventist Church. Our pioneers felt that we would be in heaven the seventh millennium from creation. This *is not* time setting because we do not know the date of creation. But we know that the end is upon us. The seventh millennium is tied directly to the seventh year sabbath rest in the Old Testament.

Excuse Three: *There is nothing new to learn. All we need to do is be ready and enjoy what is coming to pass!*

“The *unfulfilled predictions* of the book of Revelation are soon to be fulfilled. This prophecy is now to be studied with diligence by the people of God and *should be clearly understood*. It does not conceal the truth; *it clearly forewarns, telling us what will be in the future.*” Notebook Leaflets from the Elmshaven Library, vol. 1, p. 96 (1903).

Fascinating! So much of our prophetic interpretation has been historical that we have overlooked a remarkable warning that history will be repeated. Unfulfilled prophecy is ahead of us and right *now* prophecies that were clearly pointed to as being in the future are now being fulfilled!

“The prophecies of Daniel and of John are to be understood. They interpret each other. They give to the world truths which every one should understand. These prophecies are to be witnesses in the world. *By their fulfillment in these last days they will explain themselves.*” E. G. White, *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 949.

“Even the prophets who were favored with the special illumination of the Spirit did not fully comprehend the import of the revelations committed to them. *The meaning was to be unfolded from age to age as the people of God should need the instructions therein contained...*” *The Great Controversy*, pp. 344-345.

“The truth is an advancing truth, and we must walk in the increasing light.... We must have living faith in our hearts and *reach out for larger knowledge and more advanced light.*” E. G. White, *Review and Herald*, March 25, 1890.

“Whenever the people of God are growing in grace, they will be constantly obtaining a clearer understanding of His word. *They will discern new light* and beauty in its sacred truths. This has been true in the history of the church in all ages, and thus it will *continue to the end.*” *Gospel Workers*, p. 297.

“We must not look with suspicion upon any new light which God may send, and say, Really, we cannot see that we need any more light than the old truth which we have hitherto received, and in which we are settled.” *Review and Herald*, August 7, 1894.

Excuse Four: Discussing end-time issues is simply sensationalism.

Because of the nature of men’s hearts, preparation rarely occurs without sensing some *urgency*. That urgency can be developed with deep study into His word. But God is not fooled. He will use other techniques at the end. The signs themselves will become a wake-up call to get ready. “God has a purpose in permitting the calamities to occur. They are one of His means of calling men and women to their senses. By unusual workings through nature, God will express to doubting human agencies that which He clearly reveals in His word.” *Last Day Events*, p. 28.

“They [students] should know the things that will come to pass before the closing up of the world’s history. These things concern our eternal welfare, and teachers and students should give more attention to them.” *Testimonies*, vol. 6, pp. 128, 129 (1900).

So dense, naive and resistant will be our hearts that we are told something very very interesting: “Soon after they [God’s people] had commenced their earnest cry, the angels, in sympathy, desired to go to their deliverance. But a tall, commanding angel suffered them not. He said, ‘The will of God is not yet fulfilled. They must drink of the cup. They must be *baptized with the baptism.*’” *Early Writings*, p. 272. God will orchestrate painful circumstances so that His people will become fully dependent on Him and Him alone.

As in the days of Noah, God appoints ambassadors to herald warnings that time is short. Is this sensational? Of course! But, it is not sensationalism nor is it sentimentalism.

“As in the days of Christ, there will be the deep plottings of the powers of darkness, but the message must not be muffled with *smooth words* or fair speeches, crying, ‘Peace, peace when there is not peace ... Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and show my people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins.’” *Signs of the Times*, December 12, 1897.

“The *attention* of the people must be *gained*; unless this can be done, all effort is useless.” *Selected Messages*, bk 3, p. 126.

“The people are asleep in their sins, and need to be *alarmed* before they can shake off this lethargy.” *Spiritual Gifts*, vol. 2, p. 300.

“Cutting truths must not be shunned. It needs something besides theory to reach hearts now. It needs the *stirring testimony to alarm and arouse*” *Spiritual Gifts*, vol. 2, p. 283.

These arguments are nothing more than excuses to evade the very difficult preparation for Jesus’ return. Heartfelt study into the very depth of each final issue will bring a mature craving to have an unlimited view of Jesus. It will bring hope and assurance that we can have salvation. It will inspire a thrill that soon the pain and heartache of this sinful world will soon be passed. It will stimulate the reasoning faculties that soon we will see the face of Jesus.

“And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you *unawares*.” Luke 21:34. This suggests, as Paul points out in I Thessalonians 5, that we can be so prepared and aware of the signs that that day will come expectantly.

“The kingdom of heaven is at hand.” Matthew 4:17. Praise God!

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