

Thursday, 4 June 2015, 9:00 a.m.

The Lord is coming. Are you ready?

Introduction. The name Seventh-day Adventists refers to our two most distinctive doctrines, the Sabbath and the Second Coming. We have many songs about the Lord's return. When I think about it, especially two hymns arise in my mind and tend to stir my lips. One of them is "The Lord is coming. Are you ready?" The other is "Lift up the trumpet and loud let it ring." Both of them are linked with two gospel agencies. "Lift up the trumpet and loud let it ring" was the theme song of **The Voice of Prophecy**. Every time just before evangelist H.M.S. Richards began a broadcast, it would be sung by the **King's Heralds** quartet. Among their other songs was "The Lord is coming. Are you ready?"

One day at a camp meeting in South Africa, my wife Ria and I heard Dr. Leroy Lategan, a physician soloist with one of the most beautiful bass voices that I have ever heard, singing: "The Lord is coming. Are you ready?" But he changed the last verse to: "The Lord is ready. Are you coming?" I really love those and other similar hymns. My theme today is the Second Coming, what it will be like, the prophetic basis for this doctrine, those who oppose it, why we must nevertheless proclaim it, and its meaning to us personally.

1. How will the Lord return?—Acts 1:11 and Rev. 1:7. About this, the Scriptures are very clear. All my quotations in this lecture will be from the New King James Version (NKJV).

The Lord's ascent to heaven was physical, real, and visible into a rather mysterious cloud. After he had disappeared from his disciples' sight, two angels said to them: "This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11). The last book in the Bible reinforces this teaching: "Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see him, even they who pierced him. And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him" (Rev. 1:7).

But there are those who contradict this verse, for instance Jehovah's Witnesses. Apparently they predicted that Jesus would return in 1914. Of course he did not, so they said he did so in heaven. They then began to stress a secondary meaning of the Greek word *parousia*, used in conjunction with Christ's coming again, i.e., "a being present, presence," "a coming," "an arrival."

Aha! They had an "out"! This Greek word is also used in 2 Thess. 2:8 and 1 Thess. 3:13. Perhaps in this they were also influenced by a Roman Catholic source, Luis del Alcázar/Alcázar (1554–1613), a Spanish Jesuit of the Counter Reformation. His masterpiece was an *Investigation of the Hidden Sense of the Apocalypse*, a 900-page commentary. Alcázar was largely a Preterist, but he also used other methods of interpreting prophecy such as Idealism, based on allegorization. He got some of his notions from Origen (c. 185-254), for whom nothing in the Bible was literal. Everything was symbolic. Regarding Rev. 1:7, Alcázar did not contradict the idea that Christ would "come to Judgment in a *material cloud*," but for him "so beautiful and apt is the symbolical signification of *clouds*" that he explained this verse in a way that Origen could have liked: "Behold, the Apocalypse sets before us the Advent of Christ in the *clouds of the preaching of the Gospel*, by means of which God pours down His heavenly shower, that is, the spirit of peace and of prayer." What is my source for this? It is in my latest book, *A More Sure Word of Prophecy*.

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2. The Second Coming as Jesus describes it.

Sitting on the Mount of Olives, our Lord looked down through the centuries, beyond the destruction of Jerusalem, to his Return. He warned against false Christs and false prophets. “If they say to you, ‘Look, He is in the desert!’ do not go out; or ‘Look, He is in the inner rooms!’ do not believe it. For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be.” (Matt. 24:26, 27) Jesus will not come to Mormon Utah or reveal himself through a Spiritualistic séance. Nor will a secret rapture precede his return. No, according to the apostle Paul, it will be very concrete, visible and loud: “For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. The Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air.” (1 Thess. 4:15-17) Notice the cloud motif, which also appears in Acts and the Revelation.

3. The Second Coming will follow a period of great tribulation.

In the Olivet Discourse, Jesus related his own predictions to Daniel’s prophecy about the “abomination of desolation” (Matt. 24:15). At some time after the destruction of Jerusalem, there was to be “great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be. And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect’s sake those days will be shortened” (Matt. 24:21, 22). These words plainly echo and expand on Dan. 12:1: “And there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation, even to that time.” Jesus also said: “Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.” (Matt. 24:29-31) Once more the clouds, apparently a host of angels, are mentioned.

In several places, our Lord made it plain that the date and the hour of his Second Coming were unknown. Nevertheless, it would be preceded by signs; therefore, “When you see all these things, know that it is near—at the doors!” (Matt. 24:33). A passage in the Apocalypse links up closely with his prediction that day on the Mount of Olives. “I looked when He opened the sixth seal, and behold, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became like blood. And the stars of heaven fell to the earth, as a fig tree drops its late figs when it is shaken by a mighty wind. Then the sky receded as a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and island was moved out of its place. And the kings of the earth, the great men, the rich men, the commanders, the mighty men, every slave and every free man, hid themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains, and said to the mountains and rocks: ‘Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand?’” (Rev. 6:12-17)

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Did any of these things happen at or near 1798, when the 1,260 year-days ended? Yes, and very literally. On November 1, 1755, one of the deadliest earthquakes and tsunamis in history almost totally destroyed Lisbon together with other cities of Portugal. Walls of water struck Morocco, North Africa and many other places further afield. Effects were noticed as far north as Finland and westward in the Caribbean. Many thousands of people, perhaps as many as 40,000 or 50,000, lost their lives. Not long afterwards, on May 19, 1780, the New England states in America and even parts of Canada experienced the Great Dark Day, when for hours the sun did not shine. This was not an eclipse such as often happens somewhere in the world. The extraordinary darkness began between 10:00 and 11:00 a.m. and lasted until the middle of the next night. When the moon became visible, it was as red as blood. It has been suggested that the Great Dark Day may have been caused by a combination of gigantic forest fires, thick fog, and cloud cover. But the atmosphere is always perfectly clear when a blood red moon rises and sets. Then on November 13, 1833, the most spectacular shower of Leonid meteorites seemed to rain stars onto the earth. Some of these were bursting fireballs. One of them looked bigger than the moon. These phenomena were observed over various parts of the United States. Additional details about them can be Googled up on the Internet.

These events, which were partly predicted in Matthew 24 and fully in Revelation 6, clustered together in a specific sequence, all within less than eighty years—between 1780 and 1833. They occurred near the end of the 1,260 year-days. The severity of papal persecution characterizing this period had, as Jesus promised, been shortened by the Reformation and disappeared from Protestant countries.

4. The Great Sevenfold Time Prophecy.

According to Daniel, this period of trouble —to which Jesus later referred—was related to a time prophecy and great distress for the righteous: “It shall be for a time, times, and half a time, and when the power of the holy people has been completely shattered, all these things shall be finished” (Dan. 12:7). An earlier chapter dealt with the blasphemous Little Horn power, which “shall intend to change times and law. Then the saints shall be given into his hand for a time and times and half a time” (Dan. 7:25). This is the papacy that would persecute the people of God.

This prophetic period is mentioned in the Bible seven times, twice in the book of Daniel and five times in the Revelation. It is presented in three ways: as 3½ years, 42 months, and 1,260 days (Rev. 11:2, 3; 12:6, 14; 13:5). These 1,260 prophetic days are 1,260 calendar years, i.e., 538-1798. In the Apocalypse, this time period is also linked to the persecution of God’s people by three powers: the devil, symbolized by the great red dragon; his sidekick, the papal Antichrist, symbolized by the Beast that came up out of the sea, with its seven heads and ten horns; and an ecumenical, Protestant America, symbolized by a two-horned Beast. The Antichrist is depicted as a composite creature. Overall it is a giant leopard, with an admixture of lionlike and bearlike features. It also has seven heads and ten horns. It is a perfect compound of the four beasts coming up out of the sea, as depicted in Daniel 7. The latter also have among them seven heads and ten horns. Jesus said that for the elect’s sake those days would be shortened. In practice, the persecution was greatly diminished about 200 years before 1798 through the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century.

5. Prophetic Historicism and its Naysayers.

Seventh-day Adventists, like many Protestant Reformers of olden days, are Historicists. That is, they compare the prophecies of the Bible with the events of history and find a perfect match. Some of these predictions were literal, like the Lord's Olivet Discourse, or symbolic, like those in Daniel and the Revelation. The time period of 1,260 years is symbolic, based on two Scriptures: Num. 14:34 and Eze. 4:6.

Preterists and Futurists reject this method of interpretation. They especially object to the year-day principle as applied to the 1,260 days, 42 months, and 3½ years in Bible prophecy. For them, this is literal time. Interestingly, Futurists do believe that the 70 weeks in Daniel 9 are symbolic, i.e., every week of 7 prophetic days represents 7 calendar days. They also say, however, that the one who is cut off in the middle of the week is not Christ but the Antichrist. For this, they divide that 7-year period into two literal 3½-year segments of 1,260 days each. But, as I show in my books, this is a fallacy; three and a half calendar years do not consist of 1,260 days. If you calculate it, you will find that there are a little more than 1,278 days.

I am not clever at math or arithmetic calculations. I discovered this in a most remarkable way. One day I sat on a couch in my living room. I was thinking about this time period. Suddenly a voice clearly said in my mind: "Take your little calculator and see whether there are really 1,260 literal days in a calendar year." I did so and within about three minutes discovered there are not. Everybody knows that in the Gregorian calendar that we all use a year is 365 days but 366 days for leap years. (On an annual basis, it is actually 365.2422 days.) Three and a half years of literal time is 1,278.34 days, and not 1,260. The prophetic period falls short by a little more than 18 days! The 1,260 days are actually somewhat less than 41½ months of our time; that is, just under 3 years and 5½ months.

That calculation of the Futurists does not work out. The math is wrong. Therefore, the 1,260 prophetic times must be a symbolic period, according to the year-day principle. When you are able to do so, please use your own calculator to check what I have just told you. I wrote about this calculation in my *Christ and Antichrist in Prophecy and History* as well as a comprehensive article "A Dispensationalist Calculation Error," published by *Ministry Magazine* during August 2002.

6. What is Preterism and Futurism and what is it really all about?

These deviant methods of prophetic interpretation have very old roots but attained their classical form during the Counter Reformation in the sixteenth century. Both of them reject the year-day principle and belong to Roman Catholic eschatology. Each was perfected by a scholarly Jesuit to defend his church against Protestant Historicists, who taught that the papacy was the Antichrist.

The father of Preterism was Luis del Alcázar/Alcázar, to whom we have already referred. He said the Little Horn of Daniel 7 could not be the pope but referred to Antiochus IV (c. 215-164 B.C.), nicknamed Epiphanes, who lived 160 years before Christ. There are several objections to this view. One is that the destruction of the Jewish temple lasted only three years and ten days, from Chislev 15, 168 B.C. to Chislev 25, 165, and not three and a half years as predicted in the Bible. More serious is the fact that Jesus cited Daniel and related "the abomination of desolation" to the siege of Jerusalem after his time.

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Futurism, the other school of prophetic interpretation which opposed to Historicism, was also formulated by a Spanish Jesuit, Francisco Ribera (1537-1591). For him the career of the Antichrist lay in the future and therefore could not be the papacy. An important element of this viewpoint is that the 1,260 days are 3½ literal years. As already shown, there are actually more than 1278 days in 3½ calendar years. Ribera knew of this discrepancy, though he did not spell out the details but brushed them aside.

7. Most Protestants have given up Historicism and adopted Catholic Preterism or Futurism.

A sad fact is that Catholic Preterism and Futurism have also been adopted by Protestants. The latter, which is very popular among Southern Baptists, is known as Dispensationalism. More details about this, as well as my sources, appear in my books: *A More Sure Word of Prophecy* (2015), *The Use and Abuse of Prophecy: History, Methodology, and Myth* (2007); *Christ and Antichrist in Prophecy and History* (2001, 2013), and *The Truth About 666 and the Story of the Great Apostasy* (2011, 2013).

Preterism, Futurism, and even Idealism—which greatly differ—have one thing in common. They deflect the finger of prophetic accusation away from the papacy.

Even sadder than this general Protestant declension from the faith of their fathers, which was once delivered to them, is a similar tendency among some Seventh-day Adventist scholars. I have seen an e-mail which records the rejection of Gus Foster's ideas by a professor at one of our colleges. He said that Gus was wrong because of his *a priori* reliance on Historicism. Now, what does this expression mean? A Yahoo dictionary search came up with three related definitions. "*A priori*: 1. Proceeding from a known or assumed cause to a necessarily related effect; deductive. 2. Derived by or designating the process of reasoning without reference to particular facts or experience. 3. Knowable without appeal to particular experience."

Despite his Ph.D., this professor, who teaches ministers, did not himself understand Historicism. None of these definitions fit it. On the contrary, it is the only method of interpretation that closely compares what the Bible foretells with actual historical events. This cannot be said of Preterism, Futurism, or Idealism.

Conclusion. Now let me return to my initial questions: "The Lord is coming. Are you ready?" and "The Lord is ready. Are you coming? But I must also remind you that he has given us a job to do for him. We must proclaim the Second Coming correctly, and expose the heresies that undermine it. The whole world must know the truth and be able to prepare to meet our Lord when he returns in power and glory, so that he can be their Saviour and not the one whose brightness will destroy the wicked ones. Please avoid the Simon Peter complex. He wanted to be well thought of by everybody. This made him a coward when a serving girl identified him as one of the Lord's disciples. Even after his conversion, this tendency made him shun his Gentile fellow believers when Jewish Christians turned up at Antioch. For this, the apostle Paul had to rebuke him in public. No, lift up the trumpet, and loud let it ring. Do not, as some people do, stuff a potato into it to muffle its tones. Jesus is coming again!